# AFTER THE FUNERAL

Richard Abernethie died a very wealthy man. All the

relatives who attended his funeral benefited by his death.

Although the newspaper announcements of his death said 'suddenly athis residence; there was no reason to suspect that his

death was anything but a natural one - or was there? One person certainly thought so, and old Mr Entwhistle, the

family lawyer, was uneasy. He began to consider the various

members of the Abernethie family. Though outwardly

prosperous, how badly did they need the money old

Richard's death-brought them? Succeeding events deepened

Mr Entwhistle's uneasiness /into active alarm. How best

could he serve the interests of the Abernethie family, and

what would his dead friend Richard Abernethie have wished

him to do?

Entwhistle goes for help to Hercule Poirot, an old friend of

his, and the little Belgian solves things in his own inimitable

way; making sense out of apparent nonsense; piecing things

together from such widely different clues as a piece of

wedding cake and a bouquet of wax flowers.

If there is one thing better than an Agatha Christie, it is an

Agatha Christie with Poirot. AJer the Funeral shows this

happy partnership at its unbeatable best.

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Come Tell Me How You Live

Agatha Christie: An Autobiography

AFTER

T}tI' E FUNERAL

Agatha Christie

COLLINS

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# CHAPTER I

OLD LANSCOMBE moved totteringly from room to room, pulling up the blinds. Now and then he peered with screwed up rheumy eyes through the windows.

Soon they would be coming back from the funeral. He shuffled along a little faster. There were so many windows.

Enderby Hall was a vast Victorian house built in the Gothic

style. In every room the curtains were of rich faded brocade or velvet. Some of the walls were still hung with faded silk. In the green drawing-room, the old butler glanced up at the portrait above the mantelpiece of old Cornelius Abernethie for whom Enderby Hall had been built. Cornelius Abernethie's brown beard stuck forward aggressively, his hand rested on a terrestrial globe, whether by desire of the sitter, or as a symbolic conceit on the part 'of the artist, no one could tell.

A very forceful looking gentleman, s6 old Lanscombe had always thought, and was glad that he himself had never known him personally. Mr. Richard had been his gentleman. A good master, Mr. Richard. And taken very sudden, he'd been, though of course the doctor had been attending him for some little time. Ah, but the master had never recovered from the shock of young Mr. Mortimer's death. The old man shook his head as he hurried through a connecting door into the White Boudoir. Terrible, that had been, a real catastrophe. Such a fine upstanding young gentleman, so strong and healthy. You'd never have thought such a thing likely to happen to him. Pitiful, it had been, quite pitiful. And Mr. Gordon killed in the war. One thing on top of another. That was the way things went nowadays. Too much for the master, it had been. And yet he'd seemed almost himself

a week ago.

The third blind in the White Boudoir refused to go up as it should. It went up a little way and stuck. The springs were weak--that's what it was--very old, these blinds were, like everything else in the house. And you couldn't get these old things mended nowadays. Too old-fashioned, that's what they'd say, shaking their heads in that silly superior way--as if the old things weren't a great deal better than the new ones! He could tell them that! Gimcrack, half the new



stuff was---ca,ne to pieces in your hand. The material wasn't good, or the craftsmanship either. Oh yes, could tell them.

Couldn't do nything about this blind unless he got the steps. He didn t like climbing up the steps much, these days, made him come over §iddy. Anyway, he'd leave the blind for now. It didn't matter, since the White Boudoir didn't face the front of the house where it would be seen as the cars came back from the funeral-and it wasn't as though the room was ever used nowadays. It was a lady's room, this, and there hadn't been a lady ,a,t Enderby for a long while now. A pity Mr. Mortimer hadn t married. Always going off to Norway

for fishing and to Scotland for shooting and to Switzerland for those winter sports, instead of marrying some NICE youn lady and settling down at home with children running about the house. It was a long time since there had been any ch/ldren in the house.

And Lanscombe's mind went ranging back to a time that stood out clearly and distinctly--much more distinctly than the last twenty years or so, which were all blurred and confused and he couldn't really remember who had come ad gone or indeed what they looked like. But he could remember the old days well enough.

More like a father to those young brothers and sisters of his, Mr. Richard had been. Twenty-four when his father had died, and he'd pitched in right away to the business, going off every lay as punctual as clockwork, and keeping the house runnin§ and everything as lavish as it could be. A very happy household with all those young ladies and gentlemen §rowin§ up. Fights and quarrels now and again, of course, and those governesses had had a bad time of it I Poor sp/rited creatures, governesses, Lanscombe had always despised them. Very sp/rited the young ladies had been. Miss Geraldine in particular. Miss Cora, too, although she was so much younger.

And now Mr. Leo was dead, and Miss Laura gone too. And Mr. Timothy such a sad invalid. And Miss Geraldine dying somewhere abroad. And Mr. Gordon killed in the war.

Although he was the eldest, Mr. Richard himself turned out

the strongest of the lot. Outlived them all, he had---at least not quite because Mr. Timothy was still alive and little Miss Cora who'd married that unpleasant artist chap. Twenty-five years since he'd seen her and she'd been a pretty young girl when she went of/with that chap, and now he'd hardly have known her, rown so stout--and so arty-crafty in her dress! A Frenchman her husband had been, or nearly a

Frenchman--and no good ever came of marrying one of them I But Miss Cora had always been a bit--well, simple like you'd call it if she'd lived in a village. Always one of them in a family. "Why, it's Lanscombe I"

She'd remembered him all right. ·

she'd said and seemed ever so pleased to see him. Ah, they'd all been fond of him in the old days and when there was a dinner party they'd crept down to the pantry and he d gave them jelly an,d. Charlotte Russe when it came out of the.dining-room. They d all known old Lanscombe, and now there was hardly anyone who remembered. Just the younger lot whom he could never keep clear in his mind and who just thought of him as a butler who'd been there a long time. A lot of strangers, he had thought, when they all arrived for the funeral--and a seedy lot of strangers at that I

Not Mrs. Leo--she was different. She and Mr. Leo had come here off and on ever since Mr. Leo married. She was a nice lady, Mrs. Leo---a rea/lady. Wore proper clothes and

did her hair well and looked what she was. And the master had always ben fond of her. A pity that she and Mr. Leo had never had any children ....

Lanscombe roused himself; what was he doing standing here and dreaming about old days with so much to be done ? The blinds were all attended to on the ground floor now, and he'd told Janet' to go upstairs and do the bedrooms. He and Janet and the cook had gone to the funeral service in the church but instead of going on to the Crematorium they'd driven back to the house to get the blinds up and the lunch ready. Cold lunch, of course, it had to be. Ham and chicken and tongue and salad. With cold le,mon souffi and apple tart to follow. Hot soup first--and he d better go along and see that Mariorie had got it on ready to serve, for they'd be back in a minute or two now for certain.

Lanscombe broke into a shuffling trot across the room. His gaze, abstracted and uncurious, just swept up to the picture over this mantelpiece--the companion portrait to the one in the green drawing-room. It was a nice painting of white satin and pearls. The human being round whom they were draped and clasped was not nearly so impressive. Meek features, a rosebud mouth, hair parted in the middle. A woman both modest and unassuming. The only thing really worthy of note about Mrs. Cornelius Abernethie had been her name--Coralie.

For over sixty years after their original appearance, Corm

Cornplasters and the allied "Coral" foot preparations still

7

always been a good devoted wife to Timothy. Looking after his health, fussing over him--fussing over him a bit too much, probably. Was there really anything the matter with Timothy ? Just a hypochondriac, Mr. Entwhistle suspected. Richard Abernethie had suspected so, too. "Weak chest, of course, when he was a boy," he had said. "But blest if I think there's much wrong with him now." Oh well, everybody had to have some hobby. Timotly's hobby was the all absorbing one of his own health. Was Mrs. Tim taken in ? Probably not--but women never admitted that sort of thing. Timothy must be quite comfortably off. He'd never been a spendthrift. However, the extra would not come amiss--not in these days of taxation. He'd probably had to retrench his scale of living a good deal since the war.

Mr. Entwhistle transferred his attention to George Cross-field, Laura's son. Dubious sort of fellow Laura had married. Nobody had ever known much about him. A stockbroker he had called himself. Young George was in a solicitor's office--not a very reputable firm. Good-looking young fellow--but something a little shifty about him. He couldn't have too much to live on. Laura had been a complete fool over her investments. She'd left next to nothing when she

died five years ago. A handsome romantic girl, she'd been,

but no money sense.

Mr. Entwhistle's eyes went on from George Crossfield.

Which of the two girls was which ? Ah yes, that was Rosamund,

Geraldine's daughter, looking at the wax flowers on

the malachite table. Pretty girl, beautiful, in fact--rather a

silly face. On the stage. Repertory companies or some

nonsense like that. Had married an actor, too. Good-looking

fellow. "And knows he is," thought Mr. Entwhistle,

who was prejudiced against the stage as a profession. "Wonder what sort of a background he has and where he comes from."

He looked disapprovingly at Michael Shane with his fair

hair and his haggard charm.

Now Susan, Gordon's daughter, would do much better on

the stage than Rosamund. More personality. A little too

much personality for everyday life, perhaps. She was quite

near him and Mr. Entwhistle studied her covertly. Dark hair,

hazel--almost golden-eyes, a sulky attractive mouth. Beside

her was the husband she had just married--a chemist's

assistant, he understood. Really, a chemist's assistant I In

Mr. Entwhistle's creed girls did not marry young men who

served behind a counter. But now of course, they married anybody I The young man, who had a pale nondescript face IO

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Life class and there she had met Pierre Lansquenet

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II

Re-entering the room Lanscombe murmured in muted tones suitable to the occasion:

"Luncleon is served."

CHAPTER II

AITER THE delicious chicken soup, and plenty of cold viands accompanied by an excellent chablis, the funeral atmosphere lightened. Nobody had really felt any deep grief for Richard Abernethie's death since none of them had had any close ties with him. Their behaviour had been suitably decorous and subdued (with the exception of the uninhibited Cora who was clearly enjoying herself) but it was now felt that the decencies had been observed and that normal conversation could be resumed. Mr. Entwhistle encouraged this attitude. He was experienced in funerals and knew exactly how to set correct funeral timing.

After the meal was over, Lanscombe indicated the library

for coffee. This was his feeling for niceties. The time had come when business in other words, The Will--would be discussed. The hbrary had the proper atmosphere for that with its bookshelves and its heavy red velvet curtains. He served coffee to them there and then withdrew, closing the door.

After a few desultory remarks, everyone began to look tentatively at Mr. Entwhistle. He responded promptly after glancing at his watch.

"I have to catch the 3.30 train," he began.

Others, it seemed, also had to catch that train.

"As you know," said Mr. Entwhistle, "I am the executor of Richard Abernethie's will "

He was interrupted.

"I didn't know," said Cora Lansquenet brightly. "Are you ? Did he leave me anything ?"

Not for the first time, Mr. Entwhistle felt that Cora was too apt to speak out of turn.

Bending a repressive glance at her he continued:

"Up to a year ago, Richard Abernethie's will was very simple. Subject to certain legacies he left everything to his son Mortimer."

"Poor Mortimer," said Cora. "I do think all this infantile paralysis is dreadful."

"Mortimer's death, coming so suddenly and tragically, was a great blow to Richard. It took him some months to rally

from it. I pointed out to him that it might be advisable for him to make new testamentary dispositions."

Maude Abernethie asked in her deep voice:

"What would have happened if he hadn't made a new will ? Would it--would it all have gone to Timothy--as the next of kin, I mean ?"

Mr. Entwhistle opened his month to give a disquisition on the subject of next of kin, thought better of it, and said crisply:

"On my advice, Richard decided to make a new will. First of all, however, he decided to get better acquainted with the younger generation."

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and Michael."

Gregory, Banks said sharply, his thin

face flushing:

"I don t think you ought to put it like that,

Susan. On

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' But that was what it was, wasn't it, Mr.

Entwhistle ?

"Did he leave rne anything ?"

repeated Cora.

Mr. Entwhistle coughed and spoke rather

coldly '

"I propose to send you all copies of the will. I

can read

it to you in full now if you like but its legal

phraseology mai

seem to you rather obscure. Briefly it amounts to

this: After

certain mall bequests and a substantial legacy to Lanscombe to purchase an annuity, the bulk of the estate--a very con siderable one--is to be divided into six equal portions. Four of these, after all duties are paid, are to go to Richard's brother Timothy, his nephew George Crossfield, his niece Susan Banks, and his niece Rosamund Shane. The other two portions are to be held upon trust and the income from them paid to Mrs. Helen Abernethie, the widow of his brother Leo; and to his sister vlrs. Cora Lansquenet, during their lifetime. The capital after their death to be divided between the other four beneficiaries or their issue.

"That's wr,y, nice!" said Cora Lansquenet with real appreciation. An income I

How much ?"

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"Can't you

give me any idea ?"

,M,r. Entwhistle realised

that Cora must be appeased.

Possibly somewhere in the

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four

th,o, usand a year."

' Goody I "said Cora. "I shall go to

Capri."

Helen

Abernethie

said

softly:

x3

"How very kind and generous of Richard. I do appreciate

his affection towards me."

"He was very fond of you," said Mr. Entwhistle. "Leo was his favourite brother and your visits to him were always

much appreciated after Leo died."

Helen said regretfully:

"I wish I had realised how ill he was--I came up to see

him not long before he died, but although I knew he had been

ill, I did not think it was serious."

"It was always serious," said Mr. Entwhistle. "But he

did not want it talked about and I do not believe that anybody

expected the end to come as soon as it did. The doctor was

quite surprised, I know."

"'Suddenly, at his residence,' that's what it said in the

paper," said Cora, nodding her head. "I wondered, then."

"It was a shock to all of us," said blaude Abernethie. ' It

upset poor Timothy dreadfully. So sudden, he kept saying.

So sudden."

"Still, it's been hushed up very nicely, hasn't it ?" said

Cora.

.

,E, verybody stared at her and she seemed a little fiu, s, tered.

I think you're all quite right," she said hurriedly. Quit right. I mean--it can't do any good--makinit public.

Very unpleas,a, nt for everybody. It should be lept strictly

in the family.

The faces turned towards her looked even more blank.

Mr. Entwhistle leaned forward:

"Really, Cora, I'm afraid I don't quite understand what you mean."

Cora Lansquenet looked round at the family in wide-eyed s2 i2 e;nt.She tilted her head on one side with a birdlike

"But he was murdered, wasn't he ?" she said.

## CHAPTER III

TRaWI.I.IG TO London in the corner of a first-class carriage /lr. Entwhistle gave himself up to somewhat uneasy thought over that extraordinary remark made by Cora Lansquenet. Of course Cora was a rather unbalanced and excessively stupid woman, and she had been noted, even as a girl, for the embarrassing manner in which she had blurted out unwelcome truths. At least, he didn't mean truths--that was quite the



wrong word to use. Awkward statements--that was a much better term.

In his mind he went back over the immediate sequence to

that unfortunate remark. The combined stare of many startled and disapproving eyes had roused Cora to a sense of the enormity of what she had said.

Maude had exclaimed, "Really, Cora I" George had said, "My dear Aunt Cora." Somebody else had said, "What do you mean ?"

And at once Cora Lansquenet, abashed, and convicted of enormity, had burst into fluttering phrases.

"Oh I'm sorry--I didn't mean--oh, of course, it was very stupid of me, but I did think from what he said

Oh, of

course I know it's quite all right, but Iris death was so sudden--please forget that I said anything at all---I didn't mean to be so stupid--I know I'm always saying the wrong thing."

And then the momentary upset had died down and there had been a practical discussion about the disposition of the late Richard Abernethie's personal effects. The house and its

contents, Mr. Entwhistle supplemented, would be put up for

sale.

Cora's unfortunate gaffe had been forgotten. After all,

Cora had always been, if not subnormal, at any rate embarrassingly naive. She had never had any idea of what should

or should not be said. At nineteen it had not mattered so

much. The mannerisms of an enfant terrible can persist to

then, but an enfant trrible of nearly fifty is decidedly disconcerting.

To blurt out unwelcome truths--

Mr. Entwhistle's train of thought came to an abrupt check.

It was the second time that that disturbing word had occurred. Truths. And why was it so disturbing ? Because, of course,

that had always been at the bottom of the embarrassment that

Cora's outspoken comments had caused. It was because her ave statements had been either true or had contained some

grain of truth that they had been so embarrassing I

Although in the plump woman of forty-nine, Mr. Entwhistle

had been able to see little resemblance to the gawky girl of

earlier days, certain of Cora's mannerisms had persisted--the

slight bird-like twist of the head as she brought out a particularly

outrageous remark---a kind of air of pleased expectancy.

In just such a way had Cora once commented on the figure of

the kitchen-maid. "Mollie can hardly get near the kitchen

table, her stomach sticks out so. It's only been like that the

last month or two. I wonder why she's getting so fat ?"

Cora had been quickly hushed. The Abernethie household was Victorian in tone. The kitchen-maid had disappeared from the premises the next day, and after due inquiry the second gardener had been ordered to make an honest woman of her and had been presented with a cottage in which to do so. Far-off memories--but they had their point...

Mr. Entwhistle examined his uneasiness more closely. Vtmt was there in Cora's ridiculous remarks that had remained to tease his subconscious in this manner ? Presently, he isolated two phrases. "I did think from what he said-- and "his death was so sudden .... "

Mr. Entwhistle examined that last remark first. Yes, Richard's death could, in a fashion, be considered sudden. 5Ir. Entwhistle had discussed Richard's health both with Richard himself and with his doctor. The latter had indicated plainly that a long life could not be expected. If Mr. Abernethie took reasonable care of himself he might live two or even three years. Perhaps longer--but that was unlikely. In any case the doctor had anticipated no collapse in the near future.

Well, the doctor had been wrong--but doctors, as they were the first to admit themselves, could never be sure about the individual reaction of a patient to disease. Cases given up, unexpectedly recovered. Patients on the way to recovery, relapsed and died. So much depended on the vitality of the

patient. On his own inner urge to live.

And Richard Abernethie, though a strong and vigorous
man, had had no great incentive to live.

For six months previously his only surviving son, Mortimer,
had contracted infantile paralysis and had died within a week.
/-lis death had been a shock greatly augmented by the fact
that he had been such a particularly strong and vital young
:nan. A keen sportsman, he was also a good athlete and was
one of those people of whom it was said that he had never had
a day's illness in his life. He was on the point of becoming
engaged to a very charming girl and his father's hopes for the
future were centred in this dearly loved and thoroughly satisfactory
son of his.

Instead had come tragedy. And besides the sense of personal
loss, the future had held little to stir Richard Abernethie's
interest. One son had died in infancy, the second
without issue. He had no grandchildren. There was, in fact,
no one of the Abernethie name to come after him, and he was
the holder of a vast fortune with wide business interests
which he himself still controlled to a certain extent. Who



wa to succeed to that fortune and to the control of those interests ?

That this had worried Richard deeply, Entwhistle knew.

Itis only surviving brother was ver., much.of, a, ,invali.d. There remained the younger generation, tt naa oeen m ....... :-d the lawver thought, though his friend had not actually said so, to choose one definite successor, though minor legacies would probably have beetn°made. Anyway, as Entwhistle knew, within the last six m nths Richard Aber nethie had invited to stay with him, in succession, his nephew George, his niece Susan and her husband, his niece Rosamund and her husband, and his sister-in-law, Mrs. Leo Abernethie. It was amongst the first three, so the lawyer thought, that Abernethie had looked for his successor. Helen Abernethie, he thought, had been asked out of personal affection and even possibly as someone to consult, for Richard had always held a high opinion of her good sense and practica[ judgment. Mr. Entwhistle also remembered that sometime during that six months period Richard had paid a short visit to his

brother Timothy.

The net result had been the will which the lawyer now carried in his brief-case. An equable distribution of property. The only conclusion that could be drawn, therefore, was that he had been disappointed both in his nephew, and in his nieces --or perhaps in his nieces' husbands.

As far as Mr. Entwhistle knew, he had not invited his sister, Cora Lansquenet, to visit him--and that brought the lawyer back to that first disturbing phrase that Cora had let slip so incoherently--" but I did think from what he said-----"

What had Richard Abernethie said ? And when had he said it ? If Cora had not been to Enderby, then Richard Abernethie must have visited her at the artistic village in

Berkshire where she had a cottage. Or was it something that

Richard had said in a letter ?

Mr. Entwhistle frowned. Cora, of course, was a very stupid

woman. She could easily have misinterpreted a phrase, and

twisted its meaning.

But he did wonder what the phrase

could have been ....

There was enough uneasiness in him to make him consider

the possibility or'approaching Mrs. Lansquenet on the subject, Not too soon. Better not make it seem of importance. But

he would like to know just what it was that Richard Abernethie

had said to her which had led her to pipe up so briskly with

that outrageous question:

"But he was murdered, wasn't h ?'

I7

In a third-class carriage, farther along the train, Gregory

Banks said to his wife:

"That aunt of yours must be completely bats I"

"Aunt Cora ?" Susan was vague. "Oh, yes, I believe she

was always a bit simple or something."

George Crossfield, sitting opposite, said sharply:

"She really ought to be stopped from going about saying things like that. It might put ideas into people's heads."

Rosamund Shane, intent on outlining the cupid's bow of her mouth with lipstick, murmured vaguely:

"I don't suppose anyone would pay any attention to what a frump like that says. The most peculiar clothes and lashings and lashings of jet "

"Well, I think it ought to be stopped," said George.

"All right, darling," laughed Rosamund, putting away her li .pstick and contemplating her image with satisfaction in the mrror. "You stop it."

I-Ier husband said unexpectedly:

"I think George is right. It's so easy to set pepte talking."

"Well, would it matter ?" Rosamund contemplated the ,uestion. The cupid's bow lifted at the corners in a smile. It might really be rather fun."

'

"Fun ?" Four voices spoke.

"Having a murder in the family," said Rosamund. "Thril ling, you know I"

It occurred to that nervous and unhappy young man Gregory Banks that Susan's cousin, setting aside her attractive exterior, might have some faint points of resemblance to her Aunt Cora. Her next words rather confirmed his impression.

"If he was murdered," said Rosamund, "who do you tlxink did it ?"

Her gaze travelled thoughtfully round the carriage.

"His death has been awfully convenient for all of us," she said thoughtfully., "llichael and I are absolutely on our beam ends. Mick s had a really good part offered to him in the Sandborne show if he can afford to wait for it. Now we'll

be in clover. We'll be able to back our own show if we want

to. As a matter of fact there's a play with a simply wonderful part. "

Nobody listened to Rosamund's ecstatic disquisition. Their attention had shifted to their own immediate future.

"Touch and go," thought George to himself. "Now I can

x8

lp,ut that money back and nobody will ever know But it

s been a near shave."

Gregory closed his eyes as he lay back against the seat. Escape from bondage.

Susan said in her clear rather hard voice, "I'm very sorry, of course, for poor old Uncle Richard. But then he was very old, and Mortimer had died, and he'd nothing to live for and it would have been awful for him to go on as an invalid year after year. Much better for him to pop off suddenly like this with no fuss."

Her hard confident young eyes softened as they watched her husband's absorbed face. She adored Greg. She sensed vaguely

that Greg cared for her less than she cared for him--but that only strengthened her passion. Greg was hers, she'd do anything for him. Anything at all ....

3

Maude Abemethie, changing her dress for dinner at Enderby, (for she was staying the night) wondered if she ought to have offered to stay longer to help Helen out with the sorting and clearing of the house. There would be all Richard's personal things... There might be letters... All important papers, she supposed, had already been taken possession of by Mr. Entwhistle. And it really was necessary for her to get back to Timothy as soon as possible. He fretted so when she was not there to look after him. She hoped he would be pleased about the will and not annoyed. He had expected, she knew, that most of Richard's fortune would come to him. After all, he was the only surviving Abernethie. Richard could surely have trusted him to look after the younger generation. Yes, she was afraid Timothy would be annoyed .... And that was so bad for his digestion. And really, when he was annoyed, Timothy could become quite unreasonable. There were times when he seemed to lose his sense of proportion... She wondered if she ought to speak to Dr. Barton about it... Those sleeping pills--Timothy

had been taking far too many of them lately--he got so angry when she wanted to keep the bottJ, e for him. But they could be dangerous ,D,r. Barton had said so---you could get drowsy and forget you d taken them--and then take more. And then anything might happen I There certainly weren't as many left in the bottle as there ought to be .

. . Timothy was really very naughty about medicines. He wouldn t listen to her... He was very difficult sometimes.

x9

She sighed--then brightened. Things were going to be much easier now. The garden, for instance

4

Helen Abernethie sat by the fire in the green drawing-room waiting for Maude to come down to dinner.

She looked round her, remembering old days here with Leo and the others. It had been a happy house. But a house like this needed people. It needed children and servants and big meals and plenty of roaring fires in winter. It had been a sad house when it had been lived in by one old man who had lost his son ....

Who would buy it, she wondered ? Would it be turned into

an hotel, or an institute, or perhaps one of those hostels for young people ? That was what happened to these vast houses nowadays. No one would buy them to live in. It would be pulled down, perhaps, and the whole estate built over. It made her sad to think of that, but she pushed the sadness aside resolutely. It did one no good to dwell on the past. This house, and happy days here, and Richard, and Leo, all that was good, but it was over. She had her own activities and friends and interests. Yes, her interests .... And now, with the income Richard had left her, she would be able to keep on

the villa in Cyprus and do all the things she had planned to

do.

How worried she had been lately over money--taxation--all t!:ose investments going wrong Now, thanks to Richard's money, all that was over .... Poor Richard. To die in his sleep like that had been really a great mercy .... Suddenly on the 2end--she supposed that that was what had put the idea into Cora's head. Really Cora was outrageous I She always had been. Helen remembered meeting her once abroad, soon after her marriage to Pierre

Lansquenet. She had been particularly foolish and tatuous that day, twisting her head sideways and making dogmatic statements about painting, and particularly about her husband's painting, which must have been most uncomfortable for him. No man could like his wife appearing such a fool. And Cora was a fool! Oh, well, poor thing, she couldn't help it, and that husband of hers hadn't treated her too well.

Helen's gaze

rested absently

on a bouquet of wax flowers that stood on a round malachite table. Cora had been sitting 20

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head in satisfied approval of herself. Yes, it had been tho

right thing to do.

She glanced up at the clock. Five minutes before her train

went. She drank up her tea. Not very good tea. Sho

made a grimace.

For a moment or two she sat dreaming. Dreaming of tho
future unfolding before her  She
smiled like a happy
child.
She
was really going to enjoy herself at last... She went
out to the small branch line train busily making plans ....

## CHAPTER
## IV

I

IR. EZTWmSTLE passed a very restless night. He felt so tired and so unwell in the morning that he did not get up.

His sister who kept house for him, brought up his breakfast on a tray and explained to him severely how wrong he had been to go gadding off to the North of England at his age and in his frail state of health.

Mr. Entwhistle contented himself with saying that Richard Abernethie had been a very old friend.

"Funerals!" said his sister with deep disapproval. "Funerals are absolutely fatal for a man of your age I You'll be taken off as suddenly as your precious Mr. Abernethie was if you don't take more care of yourself."

The word "suddenly" made Mr. Entwhistle wince. It also silenced him. He did not argue.

He was well aware of what had made him flinch at the word suddenly.

Cora Lansquenet I What she had suggested was definitely quite impossible, but all the same he would like to find out exactly why she had suggested it. Yes, he would go down to Lytchett St. Mary and see her. He could pretend that it was business connected with probate, that he needed her signature. No need to let her guess that he had paid any attention to her silly remark. But he would go down and see her--and he would do it soon.

He finished his breakfast and lay back on his pillows and

read The Times. He found The Times very soothing.

It was about a quarter to six that evening when his telephone rang.

He picked it up. The voice at the other end of the wire



was that of Mr. James Parrott, the present second partner of Bollard, Entwkistle, Entwhistle and Bollard.

"Look here, Entwhistle," said Mr. Parrott, "I've just been rung up by the police from a place called Lytchett St. Mary."

"Lytchett St. Mary I,"

"Yes. It seems Mr. Parrott paused a moment. Ho seemed embarrassed. "It's about a Mrs. Cora Lansquenet. Wasn't she one of the heirs of the Aberuethie estate ?"

"Yes, of course. I saw her at the funeral yesterday."

"Oh ? She was at the funeral, was she ?"

"Yes. What about her ?"

"Well," Mr. Parrot sounded apologetic. "She's---it's really most extraordinary--she's been well--murdered."

Mr. Parrott said the last word with the uttermost deprecation. It was not the sort of word, he suggested, that ought to mean anything to the firm of Bollard, Entwhistle, Entwhistle and Bollard.

"Murdered ?"

"Yes--yes--I'm afraid so. Well, I mean, there's no doubt about it."

"How did the police get on to us ?"

"Her companion, or housekeeper, or whatever she is--a

Miss Gilchrist. The police asked for the name of her nearest

relative or of her solicitors. And this Miss Gilchrist seemed

rather doubtful about relatives and their addresses, but she

knew about us. So they got through at once."

"What makes them think she was murdered ? "demanded

Mr. Entwhistle.

Mr. Parrott sounded apologetic again.

"Oh well, it seems there can't be any doubt about that--I mean it was a hatchet or something of that kind--a very

violent sort of crime."

"Robbery ?"

"That's the idea. A window was smashed and there are

some trinkets missing and drawers pulled out and all that,

but the police seem to think there might be something--well--phony

about it."

"What time did it happen ?"

"Sometime between two and four-thirty this afternoon."

"Where was the housekeeper ?"

"Changing library books in Reading. She got back about

five o'clock and found Mrs. Lansquenet dead. The police

want to know if we've any idea of who could have been

likely to attack her. I said," Mr. Parrott's voice sounded

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Nobody local is concerned, we're pretty sure of that. The

locals are all accounted for satisfactorily. Most people are at

work at that time of day. Of course her cottage is up a lane

outside the village proper., Anyone could get there easily without being seen. There s a maze of lanes all round the village. It was a fine morning and there has been no rain for some days, so there aren't any distinctive car tracks to go by--in case anyone came by car."

"You think someone came by car ?" Mr. Entwhistle asked sharply.

The Inspector shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. All I'm saying is there are curious features about the case. These, for instance--" He shoved across his desk a handful of things--a trefoil-shaped brooch with small pearls, a brooch set with amethysts, a small string of seed pearls, and a garnet

bracelet.

"Those are the things that were taken from her jewel box.

They were found just outside the house shoved into a bush."

"Yes--yes, that is rather curious. Perhaps if her assailant

was frightened at what he had done--"

"Quite. But he would probably then have left them

upstairs in her room Of

course a panic may have come

over

him between the bedroom and the front gate."

Mr.

Entwhistle said quietly:

"Or

they may, as you are suggesting, have only been taken as

a blind."

"Yes, several

possibilities... Of course this Gilchrist woman may

have done it. Two women living alone together --you never

know what quarrels or resentments or passions rn

y have been aroused. Oh yes, we're taking that possibility

into consideration as well. But it doesn't seem very likely. From all accounts they were on quite amicable terhs." He paused before going on. "According to you, nobody stands to gain by Mrs. Lansquenet's death ?"

The lawyer shifted uneasily.

"I didn't quite say that."

Inspector Morton looked up sharply.

"I thought you said that Mrs. Lansquenet's source of income was an allowance made to her by her brother and that as far as you knew she had no property or means of her own."

"That is so. Her husband died a bankrupt,and from what I knew of her as a girl and since, I should be surprised if she had ever saved or accumulated any money."

"The cottage itself is rented, not her own, and the few

sticks of furniture aren't anything to write home about, even in these days. Some spurious ' cottage oak ' and some arty painted stuff. Whoever she's left them to won't am much 2--if she's made a will, that is to say."

3rff. Entwhistle shook his head.

"I know nothing about her will. I had not seen her for many years, you must understand."

"Then what exactly did you mean just now ? You had something in mind, I think ?"

"Yes. Yes, I did. I wished to be strictly accurate." "Were you referring to the legacy you mentioned ? The one that her brother left her ? Had she the power to dispose of that by will ?"

"No, not in the sense you mean. She had no power to dispose of the capital. Now that she is dead, it will be divided amongst the five other beneficiaries of Richard Abernethie's will. That is what I meant. All five of them will benefit automatically by her death."

The Inspector looked disappointed.

"Oh, I thought we were on to something. Well, there certainly seems no motive there for anyone to come and swipe her with a hatchet. Looks as though it's some chap with a screw loose--one of these adolescent criminals, perhaps--a lot of them about. And then he lost his nerve and bushed the trinkets and ran... Yes, it must be that. Unless it's the highly respectable Miss Gilchrist, and I must say that seems

unlikely."

"When did she find the body ?"

"Not until just about five o'clock. She came back from Reading by the 4.50 bus. She arrived back at the cottage, let herself in by the front door, and went into the kitchen and put the kettle on for tea. There was no sound from Mrs. Lansquenet's room, but Miss Gilchrist assumed that she was still sleeping. Then Miss Gilchrist noticed the kitchen window; the glass was all over the floor. Even then, she thought at first it might have been done by a boy with a ball or a catapult. She went upstairs and peeped very gently into Mrs. Lansquenet's room to see if she were asleep or if she was ready for some tea. Then of course, she let loose, shrieked, and rushed down the lane to the nearest neighbour. Her story seems perfectly consistent and there was no trace of blood in her room or in the bathroom, or on her clothes. No, I don't think Miss Gilchrist had anything to do with it. The doctor got there at half-past five. He puts the time of death not later than four-thirty--and probably much nearer two o'clock, so it looks as



though whoever it was, was hanging round waiting for Miss

Gilchrist to lea, ye the cottage.

.

face twitched slightly Inspector Morton

The la er s

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. · ....

went on: 'W}tYou'll be going to see Miss Gflchnst, I suppose ?

"I thought of doing so."

"I should be glad if you would. She's told us, I think,

everything that she can, but you never know. Some,times, in

conversation, some point or other may crop up. She s a trifle

old-maidish--but quite a sensible, practical woman--and she's

really been most helpful and efficient."

He paused and then said:

"The body's at the mortuary. If you would like to see

it. "

Mr. Entwhistle assented, though with no enthusiasm.

Some few minutes later he stood looking down at the mortal remains of Cora Lansquenet. She had been savagely attacked and the henna dyed fringe was clotted and stiffened with blood. Mr. Entwhistle's lips tightened and he looked away queasily.

Poor little Cora. How eager she had been the day before yesterday to know whether her brother had left her anything. What rosy anticipations she must have had of the future. What a lot of silly things she could have done--and enjoyed doing--with the money.

Poor Cora How short a time those anticipations had lasted.

No

one had gained by her death--not even the brutal assailant who had thrust away those trinkets as he fled. Five people had a few thousands more of capital--but the capital they

had already received was probably more than sufficient for

them. No, there could be no motive there.

Funny

that murder should have been running in Cora's mind

the very day before sh, e hers,elf was murdered.

"He

was murdered, wash t he ?

Such

a ridiculous thing to say. Ridiculous! Quite ridiculous

I Much too ridiculous to mention to Inspector Morton. Of

course, after he had seen Miss Gilchrist.. ·

Supposing

that Miss Gilchrist, although it was unlikely, could

throw any light on what Richard had said to Cora.

"I

thought from what he said--" What had Richard said

?

"I must see Miss Gilchrist at once," said Mr. Entwhistle to

himself.

Miss Gilchrist was a spare faded-looking woman with short,

iron-grey hair. She had one of those indeterminate faces that

women around fifty so often acquire.

She greeted Mr. Entwhistle warmly.

"I'm so glad you have come, Mr. Entwhistle. I really know so little about Mrs. Lansquenet's family, and of course I've never, never had anything to do with a murder before. It's too dreadful I"

Mr. Entwhistle felt quite sure that Miss Gilchrist had never before had anything to do with murder. Indeed, her reaction to it was very much that of his partner.

"One reads about them, of course," said Miss Gilchrist, relegating crimes to their proper sphere." And even that I'm not very fond of doing. So sordid, most of them."

Following her into the sitting-room Mr. Entwhistle was looking sharply about him. There was a strong smell of oil paint. The cottage was overcrowded, less by furniture, which was much as Inspector Morton had described it, than by pictures. The walls were covered with pictures, mostly very dark and dirty oil paintings. But there were water-colour sketches as well, and one or two still lifes. Smaller pictures were stacked on the window-seat.

"Mrs. Lansquenet used to buy them at sales," Miss Gilchrist explained. "It was a great interest to her, poor dear. She went to all the sales round about. Pictures go so cheap, nowadays, a mere song. She never paid more than a pound for any of them, sometimes only a few shillings, and there was a wonderful chance, she always said, of picking up something worth while. She used to say that this was an Italian Primitive that might be worth a lot of money."

Mr. Entwhistle looked at the Italian Primitive pointed out to him dubiously. Cora, he reflected, had never really known anything about pictures. He'd eat his hat if any of these daubs were worth a five pound note I

"Of course," said Miss Gilchrist, noticing his expression, and quick to sense his reaction. "I don't know much myself, though my father was a painter--not a very successful one, I'm afraid. But I used to do water-colours myself as a girl and I heard a lot of talk about painting and that made it nice for Mrs. Lansquenet to have someone she could talk to about painting and who'd understand. Poor dear soul, she cared so much about artistic things."



"You were fond of her ?"

A foolish question, he told himself. Could she possibly answer" no" ? Cora, he thought, must have been a tiresome woman to live with.

"Oh yes," said Miss Gilchrist. "We get on vry well together. In some ways, you know, Mrs. Lansquenet was just like a child. She said anything that came into her he,ad.

I don't know that her judgment was always very good--

One does not say of the dead---" She was a thoroughly silly woman "--Mr. Entwhistle said, "She was not in any sense an intellectual woman."

"No--no---perhaps not. But she was very shrewd, Mr. Entwhistle. Really very shrewd. It quite surprised me sometimes--how she managed to hit the nail on the head."

Mr. Entwhistle looked at Miss Gilchrist with more interest. I-Ie thought that she was no fool herself.

"You were with Mrs. Lansquenet for some years, I think?"
"Three and a half:"

"You---er--acted as companion and also did the--er--well --looked after the house ?"

It was evident that he had touched on a delicate subject. Miss Gilchrist flushed a little.

"Oh yes, indeed. I did most of the cooking--I quite enjoy cooking--and did some dusting and light housework. None of the rough, of course." Miss Gilchrist's tone expressed a firm principle. Mr. Entwhistle who had no idea what" the rough"

was, made a soothing murmur.

"Mrs. Panter from the village came in for that. Twice a week regularly. You see, Mr. Entwhistle, I could not have contemplated being in any way a servant. When my little tea-shop failed--such a disaster--it was the war, you know. A delightful place. I called it the Willow Tree and all the china was blue willow pattern--sweetly pretty--and the cakes really good---I've always had a hand with cakes and scones. Yes I was doing really well and then the war came and supplies were cut down and the whole thing went bankrupt --a war casualty, that is what I always say, and I try to think of it like that. I lost the little money my father left me that I had invested in it, and of course I had to look round for something to do. I'd never been trained for anything. So I went to one lady but it didn't answer at all--she was so rude and overbearing--and then I did some office work--but I didn't like that at all, and then I came to Mrs. Lansquenet and we suited each other from the start--her husband being an artist and everything." Miss Gilchrist came to a breathless



stop and added mournfully: "But how I loved my dear, dear

little tea-shop. Such nice people used to come to it I"

Looking at Miss Gilchrist, Mr. Entwhistle felt a sudden

stab of recoguition--a composite picture of hundreds of ladylike

figures approaching him in numerous Bay Trees, Ginger

Cats, Blue Parrots, Willow Trees and Cosy Corners, all

chastely encased in blue or pink or orange overalls and taking

orders for pots of china tea and cakes. Miss Gilchrist had a

Spiritual Home--a lady-like tea-shop of Ye Olde Worlde

variety with a suitable genteel clientele. There must, he

thought, be large numbers of Miss Gilchrists all over the

country, all looking much alike with mild patient faces and

obstinate upper lips and slightly wispy grey hair.

Miss Gilchrist went on:

"But really I must not talk about myself. The police have

been very kind and considerate. Very kind indeed. An

Inspector Morton came over from headquarters and he was most understanding. He even arranged for me to go and

spend the night at Mrs. Lake's down the lane but I said ' No.'

I felt it my duty to stay here with all Mrs. Lansquenet's nice

things in the house. They took the--the "Miss Gilchrist

gulped a little--" the body away, of course, and locked up

the room, and the Inspector told me there would be a constable

on duty in the kitchen all night--because of the broken

window--it has been reglazed this morning, I am glad to say

--where was I ? Oh yes, so I said I should be quite all right

in my own room, though I must confess I did pull the chest of

drawers across the door and put a big jug of water on the

window-sill. One never knows--and if by any chance it was a maniac--one does hear of such things.."

Here Miss Gilchrist ran down. Mr. Entwhistle said quickly: "I am in possession of all the main facts. Inspector

Morton gave them to me. But if it would not distress you too

much to give me your own account ?"

"Of course, Mr. Entwhistle. I know just what you feel.

The police are so impersonal, are they not ? Rightly so, of

course."

"Mrs. Lansquenet got back from the funeral the night before

last," Mr. Entwhistle prompted.

"Yes, her train didn't get in until quite late. I had ordered

a taxi to meet it as she told me to. She was very tired, poor

dear--as was only natural--but on the whole she was in quite

good spirits."

"Yes, yes. Did she talk about the funeral at all ?" "Just a little. I gave her a cup of hot milk--she didn't

want anything else--and she told me that the church had been sUite full and lots and-lots of flowers--oh! and she said that

e was sorry not to have seen her other brother--Timothy--

was it ?"

"Yes, Timothy."

"She said it was over twenty years s/nce she had seen him

and that she hoped he would have been there, but she quite

realised he would have thought it better not to come under

the circumstances, but that his wife was there and that she'd

never been able to stand Maude--oh dear, I do beg your pardon,

Mr,;

Entwhistle--it just s,hpped out--I never meant "

Not at all. Not at all, said Mr. Entwhistle encouragingly.

"I am no relation, you know. And I believe that Cora and

her sister-in-law never hit it off very well."

"Well, she almost said as much. ' I always knew Maude

would grow into one of those bossy interfering women,' is

what she said. And then she was very tired and said she'd

go to bed at once--I'd got her hot-water bottle in all ready--and

she went up."

"She said nothing else that you can remember specially?"

"She had no premonition, Mr. Entwhistle, if that is what you mean. I'm sure of that. She was really, you know, in

remarkably good spirits--apart from tiredness and the--the

sad occasion. She asked me how I'd like to go to Capri. To

Capri! Of course I said it would be too wonderful--it's a

thing I'd never dreamed I'd ever do---and she said, 'We'll

go I ' Just like that. I gathered--of course it wasn't actually mentioned that her brother had left her an annuity or something

of the kind."

Mr. Entwhistle nodded.

"Poor dear. Well, I'm glad she had the pleasure of plan-ning-at

all events." Miss Gilchrist sighed and murmured

wistfully, "I don't suppose I shall ever go to Capri now..."

"And the next morning ?" Mr. Entwhistle prompted,

oblivious of Miss Gilchrist's disappointments.

"The next morning Mrs. Lansquenet wasn't at all well. Really, she looked dreadful. She'd hardly slept at all, she told me. Nightmares. 'It's because you were overtired yesterday,' I told her, and she said maybe it was. She had her breakfast in bed, and she didn't get up all the morning, but at lunch-time she told me that she still hadn't been able to sleep. ' I feel so restless,' she said. ' I keep thinking of things and wondering.' And then she said she'd take some sleeping tablets and try and get a good sleep in the afternoon. And she wanted me to go over by bus to Reading and change



her two library books, because she'd finished them both on

.train, journ.ey and she hadn't t, of an,,hin *

,, t,

e

o , , $

,-, u. LSUay

two oooks lasted her nearly

a week. So I went off just after

two

and that--and that--was the last

time

"

Miss

Gilchriat began to sniff

,,

o · .>itc must nave Peen

I .

know.

She wouldn't ha,,-- ast.

eep. you

-cmu

an

nm aria tile

assures me that she didn'+

,--^- yc, n, .g, Inspector

o,ct

-

e mnKs the lirst blow

killed her. Oh dear,

it makes me quite sick even to tink

of it I"

"Please, please. I've no wish to take you

any further

over what happened. All I wanted was to

hear what ,you could

ted me about Mrs. Lansquenet before the

tragedy;"

"Very natural, I'm

sure. Do tell her relations that apart

from hav/ng

such a bad night,she was reaJly very happy and

lookinforward to the future.

Mr. ntwhistle paused before

asking his next question. He

wanted to be careful

not to lead the witness.

"She did not mention any of

her relations

in particular ?

"No, no, I don't think so." Miss Gilchrist

considered.

"Except what she

said

about

being sorry not to

see her

brother Timothy."

T' She did no

speak a.t all .about her brother's decease

e--er---cause of it

? ·

"No."Anything like that

?"

There was no sign of alertness /n Miss Gilchr/st's face.

Mr. Entwhistle felt certain there would have been if Cora had

plumped

out her verdict of

murder.

"He'd been ili for

some time, I think,"

said Miss G/Ichr/st

vaguely, "though I mus,t say I was surpr/sed

to hear it. He

looked

so very v/gorous.'

Mr. Entwh

stle said quickl ·

You saw htm

when ?"

"When he came down here to see

Mrs. Lansquenet. Let me

see--that was about three weeks

ago."

"Did he stay

here

?"

"Oh--no--just came for

luncheon. It was quite a surprise.

Mrs.

Lansquenet hadn't expected him. I gather

there had

been some family ,disagreement She

hadn't seen him for

years, she told me.' '

"Yes, that is so."

"It quite upset her

seeing him

again and

probably

realising

how

ill

he

was "

"She knew

that

he

was

ill

?"

"Oh yes,

I

remember

quite

well.

Because

I

wondered

only

in

my

own

mind,

you

understand /f

perhaps

Mr.

a.r. . 33

Abernethie might be suffering from softening of the brain· An aunt of mine"

Mr. Entwhistle deftly side-tracked the aunt.

"Something Mrs, Lansquenet said caused you to think of

softening of the brain "

" s Mrs Lansquenet said something like '- Poor R, icha[..d

^.,Y;es2, deth must have aged him a lot. Me souncis qmte

senile. All these fancies about persecution and that someone

is poisoning him. Old people get like that.' And of course,

as I knew, that is only too true. This aunt that I was tel!lng

you about--was convinced the servants were trying to pmson

her in her food and at last would eat only boiled egg. s--because,

she said, you couldn't get inside a boiled egg to pmson,it. We

humoured her, but if it had been nowadays I don t know what we should have done. With eggs so scarce and mostly

foreign at that, so that boiling is always risky." . . . ,

Mr. Entwhistle listened to the saga of Miss Glchnst s

aunt with deaf ears. He was very much disturbed.

He said at last, when Miss Gilchrist had twittered into

silence:

"I suppose Mrs. Lansquenet didn't take all this too seriou,s,l, xl Entwhislte, she qmtunders.to, od.,

Mi."vh'"tle found that remark disturt)mg too, though

not quite in the sense in which Miss Gilchrist had used it.

Had Cora Lansquenet understood ? Not then, perhaps, but

later. Had she understood only too well ?

Mr. Entwhistle knew that there had been no senility about

Richard Abernethie. Richard had been in full possession .of his faculties. He was not the man to have persecution mama in any form. He was, as he always had been, a hardheaded business man--and his illness made no difference in that respect.

It seemed extraordinary that he should have spoken to his · . in the terms that he had. But perhaps Cora, with her sister -d read between the lines, and had odd chllOUKe snrewun - crossed the t's 'and dotted the i's of what Richard Abernethie had actually said.

In most ways, thought Mr. Entwhistle, Cora had been a complete fool. She had no judgment, no balance, nd a crude childish point of view, but she had also the child s uncanny knack of sometimes hitting the nail on the head in a way that seemed quite startling.

Mr. Entwhistle left it at that. Miss

Gilchrist, he thought,

knew no more than she had told him. He

asked

whether

she



knew if Cora Lansquenet had left a will. Miss Gilchrist replied promptly that Mrs. Lansquenet's wilt was at the Bank.

With that and after making certain further arrangements he took his leave. He insisted on Miss Gilchrist's accepting a small sum in cash to defray present expenses and told her he would communicate with her again, and in the meantime he would be grateful if she would stay on at the cottage while she was looking about for a new post. That would be, Miss Gilchrist said, a great convenience and really she was not at all nervous.

He was unable to escape without being shown round the cottage by Miss Gilchrist, and introduced to various pictures by the late Pierre Lansquenet which were crowded into the small dining-room and which made Mr. Entwhistle flinch--they were mostly nudes executed with a singular lack of draughtsmanship but with much fidelity to detail. He was

also made to admire various small oil sketches of picturesque fishing ports done by Cora herself.

"Polperro," said Miss Gilchrist proudly. "We were there last year and Mrs. Lansquenet was delighted with its picturesqueness."

Mr. Entwhistle, viewing Polperro from the southwest, from the north-west, and presumably from the several other points of the compass, agreed that Mrs. Lansquenet had certainly been enthusiastic.

"Mrs. Lansquenet promised to leave me her sketches," said Miss Gilchrist wistfully. "I admired them so much. One can really see the waves breaking in this one, can't one ? Even if she forgot, I might perhaps have just one as a souvenir, do you think ?"

"I'm sure that could be arranged," said Mr. Entwhistle graciously.

He made a few further arrangements and then left to interview the Bank Manager and to have a further consultation with Inspector Morton.

## CHAPTER V

"WORN OU?, that's what you are," said Miss Entwhistle in the indignant and bullying tones adopted by devoted sisters towards brothers for whom they keep house. "You shouldn't do it, at your age. What's it all got to do with you, I'd like to know ? You've retired, haven't you ?"

Mr. Entwhistle said mildly that Richard Abernethie had been one of his oldest friends.

"I dare say. But Richard Abernethie's dead, isn't he ? So I see no reason for you to go mixing yourself up in things that are no concern of yours and catching you-* death of cold in these nasty draughty railway trains. And murder, too[ I can't see why they sent for you at all."

"They communicated with me because there was a letter in the cottage signed by me, telling Cora the arrangements for the funeral."

"Funerals! One funeral after another, and that reminds me. Another of these precious Abernethies has been ringing you up--Timothy, ,I think he said. From somewhere in Yorkshire--and that s about a funeral, too! Said he'd ring again later."

A personal call for Mr. Entwhistle came tbxough that evening. Taking it, he heard Maude Abernethie's voice at the other end.

"Thank goodness I've got hold of you at last I Timothy has been in the most terrible state. This news about Cora has upset him dreadfully."

"Quite understandable," said Mr. Entwhistle.

"What did you say ?"

"I said it was q,uite understandable."

"I suppose so. Maude sounded more than doubtful.

"Do you mean to say it was really murder ?"

(" It was mrdr, tasn't it ?" Cora had said. But this time there was no hesitation about the answer.)

"Yes, it was murder," said Mr. Entwhistle. "And with a hatchet, so the papers say ?" "Yes."

"It seems quitincredible to me," said Maude, "that Timothy's sistermhis own sister--can have been murdered with a hatchzt I"

It seemed no less incredible to Mr. Entwhistle. Timothy's life was so remote from violence that even his relations, one felt, ought to be equally exempt.

"I'm afraid one has to face the fact," said Mr. Entwhistle mildly.

"I am really very worried about Timothy. It's so bad for him all this I I've got him to bed now but he insists on my persuading you to come up and see him. He wants to know a hundred things--whether there will be an inquest, and who ought to attend, and how soon after that the funeral can take place, and where, and what funds there are, and if Cora



expressed any wis,h? about being cremated or what, and if

she le/t a will

Mr. Entwhistle /nterrupted before the catalogue got too

long.

"There is a will, yes. She left Timoth her executor."

"Oh d,,ear, I'm afraid Timothy can t undertake any
thing..

"The firm will attend to all the necessary business. The

will's very simple. She left her own sketches and an amethyst

brooch to her companion, Miss Gilchrist, and everything else

to Susan."

"To Susan ? Now I wonder why Susan ? I don't believe

she ever saw Susan--not since she was a baby anyway."

"I imagine that it was because Susan was reported to have

made a marriage not wholly pleasing to the family."

lVlaude snorted.

"Even Gregory is a great deal better than Pierre Lans quenet ever was I Of course marrying a man who serves i,n a shop would have been unheard of in my day,--but a chemist s shop is much better than a haberdasher s--and at least Gregory seems quite respectable." She paused and added:

"Does this mean that Susan gets the income Richard left to Cora ?"

"Oh no. The capital of that will be divided according to the instructions of Richard's will. No, poor Cora had only a few hundred pounds and the furniture of her cottage to leave. When outstanding debts are paid and the furniture sold I doubt if the whole thing will amount to more than at

most five hundred pounds." He went on: "There will have

to be an inquest, of course. That is fixed for next Thursday.

If Timothy is agreeable, we'll send down you,n,g Lloyd to

watch the proceedings on behalf of the family. He added

apo. logetically: "I'm afraid it may attract some notoriety

owing to the---er--circumstances."

"How ve,r unpleasant I

Have they caught the wretch

who did it ?

"Not yet."

"One of these dreadful half-baked young men who go

about the country roving and murdering, I suppose. The

police are so incompetent."

"No, no," said Ivlr. Entwhistle. "The police are by no

means incompetent. Don't imagine that, for a moment."

"Well, it all seems to me quite extraordinary. And so bad for Timothy. I suppose you couldn't possibly come

down here, Mr. Entwhistle ? I should be most grateful if you

could. I think Timothy's mind might be set at rest if you were

here to reassure him."

Mr. Entwhistle was silent for a moment. The invitation

was not unwelcome.

"There is something in what you say," he admitted. "And

.

's signature as executor to cer, t, am

I shall need Tmothy

documents. Yes, I think it might be quite a good thing. '

"That is splendid. I am so relieved. To-morrow ? And

you'll stay the night ? The best train is the IL20 from

St. Pancras."

"It will have to be an afternoon train, I'm afraid. I have,"

sai d Mr. Entwhistle," other business in the morning "

George

Crossfield greeted Mr. Entwhistle heartily but with,

perhaps,

just a shade of surprise.

l

lr. Entwhistle said, in an explanatory way, although

it

really explained

nothing:

"I've just come up from Lytchett St.

llary."

"Then it really was Aunt Cora ? I read about

it in the

papers and I just couldn't believe it. I

thought it must be

someone

of the same name."

"Lansquenet is

not a common name."

"No, of course it isn't. I suppose

there.is a natural aversion

to believing that anyone of one's own

family can be murdered.

Sounds to me rather like that case

last month on

Dartmoor."

"Does it ?"

"Yes. Same circumstances. Cottage

in a lonely position.

Two elderly women living together.

Amount of cash taken

rea!ly quite pitifully inadequate

one would t,h, ink."

' The value of

money is always

relative,  said lr. Ent-

whistle. "It is the need that counts."

"Yes--yes, I suppose you re right.

"If you need

ten pounds desperately--then fifteen is more than adequate. And inversely also.

If your need is for a hundred r)ounds,

fortv-five would be worse than useless. And if it's tho

asands you heed, then hundreds are not enough."

George said

with a sudden flicker of the eyes: "I'd say any money

came in useful these days. Everyone's hard up."

" But not desperate,"

Mr. Entwhistle pointed out. "It's the desperation that

counts."

"Are you thinking of something in particular ?"

"Oh no, not at all." He paused then went on: "It will



be a little time before the estate is settled; would it be convenient for you to have an advance ?"

"As a matter of fact, I was going to raise the subject. However, I saw the Bank this morning and referred them to you and they were quite obliging about an overdraft."

Again there came that flicker in George's eyes, and Mr. Entwhistle, from the depths of his experience, recognised it. George, he felt certain, had been, if not desperate, then in

very sore straits for money. He knew at that moment, what he had felt subconsciously all along, that in money matters he would not trust George. He wondered if old Richard Abernethie, who also had had great experience in judging men, had felt that. Mr. Entwhistle was almost sure that after Mortimer's death, Richard Abernethie had formed the intention of making George his heir. George was not an Abernethie, but he was the only male of the younger genera tion. He was the natural successor to Mortimer. Richard Abernethie had sent for George, had had him staying in the house for some days. It seemed probable that at the end of the visit the older man had not found George satisfactory. Had he felt instinctively, as Mr. Entwhistle felt, that George

was not straight ? George's father, so the family had thought,

had been a poor choice on Laura's part. A stockbroker who

had had other rather mysterious activities. George took after

his father rather than after the Abernethies.

Perhaps misinterpreting the old lawyer's silence, George

said with an uneasy laugh:

"Truth is, I've not been very lucky with my investments

lately. I took a bit of a risk and it didn't come off. More

or less cleaned me out. But I'li be able to recoup myself now. All one needs is a bit of capital.

Ardens Consolidated are pretty good, don't you think ?"

Mr. Entwhistle neither agreed nor dissented. He was

wondering if by any chance George had been speculating with money that belonged to clients and not with his own ?

If George had been in danger of criminal prosecution

Mr. Entwhistle said precisely:

"I tried to reach you the day after the funeral, but I suppose you weren't in the office."

"Did you ? They never told me. As a matter of fact, I thought I was entitled to a day off after the good news I" "The good news ?"

George reddened.

"Oh look here, I didn't mean Uncle Richard's death. But knowing you've come into money does give one a bit of a



kick. One feels one must celebrate. As a matter of fact I went to Hurst Park. Backed two winners. It never rains but it pours I If your luck's in, it's in I Only a matter of fifty quid, but it all helps."

"Oh yes," said Mr. Entwhistle. "It all helps. And there will now be an additional sum coming to you as a result of your Aunt Cora's death."

George looked concerned.

"Poor old girl," he said. "It does seem rotten luck, doesn't it ? Probably just when she was all set to enjoy herself."

"Let us hope the police will find the person responsible for her death," said Mr. Entwhistle.

"I expect they'll get him all right. They're good, our police. They round up all the undesirables in the neighbourhood and go through 'em with a tooth comb--make them account for their actions at the time it happened."

"Not so easy if a little time has elapsed," said Mr. Ent-whistle.

He gave a wintry little smile that indicated he was about to make a joke.- "I myself was in Hatchard's bookshop at 3.3o on the day in question. Should I remember that if I were questioned by the police in ten days' time ? I very much doubt it. And you, George, you were at Hurst Park. Would you remember which day you went to the races in--say--a month's time ?"

"Oh I could fix it by the funeral--the day after." "True--true. And then you backed a couple of winners. Another aid to memory. One seldom forgets the name of a horse on which one has won money. Which were they, by the way ?"

"Let me see. Gaymarck and Frogg II. Yes, I shan't forget them in a hurry."

Mr. Entwhistle gave his dry little cackle of laughter and took his leave.

3

"It's lovely to see you, of course," said Rosamund without any marked enthusiasm.

"But it's frightfully early in the

morning."

She yawned heavily.

"It's eleven o'clock," said Mr. Entwhistle.

Rosamund yawned again. She said apologetically:
"We had the hell of a party last night. Far too much to drink. Michael's got a terrible hangover still."



Michael appeared at this moment, also yaming. He had a cup of black coffee in his hand and was wearing a very smart dressing-gown. He looked haggard and attractive--and his. smile had the usual charm. Rosamund was wearing a black skirt, a rather dirty yellow pullover, and nothing else as far as Mr. Entwhistle could judge.

The precise and fastidious lawyer did not approve at all of the young Shanes' way of living. The rather ramshackle flat on the first floor of a Chelsea house--the bottles and glasses and cigarette ends that lay about in profusion--the stale air, and the general air of dust and dishevelment.

In the midst of this discouraging setting Rosamund and Michael bloomed with their wonderful good looks. They were

certainly a very handsome couple and they seemed, Mr. Entwhistle thought, very fond of each other. Rosamund was certainly adoringly fond of Michael.

"Darling," she said. "Do you think just a teeny sip of champagne ? Just to pull us together and toast the future. Oh, Mr. Entwhistle, it really is the most marvellous luck Uncle Richard leaving us all that lovely money just now "

Mr. Entwhistle noted the quick, almost scowling frown that Michael gave, but Rosamund went on serenely:

"Because there's the most wonderful chance of a play. Michael's got an option on it. It's a most wonderful part for him and even a small part for me, too. It's about one of these young criminals, you know, that are really saints--it's absolutely full of the latest modem ideas."

"So it would seem," said Mr. Entwhistle stiffly.

"He robs, you know, and he kills, and he's hounded by the police and by society--and then in the end, he does a miracle."

Mr. Entwhistle sat in outraged silence. Pernicious nonsense these young fools talked I And wrote.

Not that Michael Shane was talking much. There was still a faint scowl on his face.

"Mr. Entwhistle doesn't want to hear all our rhapsodies, Rosamund," he said. "Shut up for a bit and let him tell us why he's come to see us."

"There are just one or two little matters to straighten out," said IVlr. Entwhistle. "I have just come back from Lytchett St. Mary."

"Then it was Aunt Cora who was murdered ? We saw it in the paper. And I said it must be because it's a very un-common name. Poor old Aunt Cora. I was looking at her at the funeral that day and thinking what a frump she was and



that really one might as well be dead if one looked like that --and now she is dead. They 'absolutely wouldn't believe it last night when I told them that that murder with the hatchet in the paper was actually my aant! They just laughed, didn't they, Michael ?"

Michael Shane did not reply and Rosamund with every appearance of enjoyment said:

"Two murders one after another. It's almost too much, isn't it ?"

"Don't be a fool, Rosamund, your Uncle Richard wasn't murdered."

"Well, Cora thought he was."

Mr. Entwhistle intervened to ask:

"You came back to London after the funeral, didn't you ?"

"Yes, we came by the same train as you did."

"Of course.., of course. I ask because I tried to get hold of you," he shot a quick glance at the telephone--" on the following day--several times in fact, and couldn't get an answer."

"Oh dear--I'm so sorry. What were we doing that day ? The day before yesterday. We were here until about twelve,

weren't we ? And then you went round to try and get hold of Rosenheim and you went on to lunch with Oscar and I went out to see if I could get some nylons and round the shops. I was to meet Janet but we missed each other. Yes, I had a lovely afternoon shopping--and then we dined at the Castile. We got back here about ten o'clock, I suppose."

"About that," said Michael. He was looking thoughtfully at Mr. Entwhistle. "What did you want to get hold of us for, sir ?"

"Ohl Just some points that had arisen about Richard Abernethie's estate--papers to sign--all that."

Rosamund asked: "Do we get the money now, or not for ages ?"

"I'm afraid," said Mr. Entwhistle, "that the law is prone to delays."

"But we can get an advance, can't we ? "Rosamund looked

alarmed. "Michael said we could.

Actually it's terribly

important. Because of the play."

Michael said pleasantly:

"Oh, there's no real hurry. It's just a question of deciding

whether or not to take up the option."

"It will be quite easy to advance you some money," said

Mr. Entwhistle. "As much as you need."



"Then that's all right." Rosarnund gave a sigh of relief.

She added as an afterthought: "Did Aunt Cora leave any

money ?"

"A little. She left it to your Cousin Susan."

"Why Susan, I should like to know I Is it much ?"

"A few hundred pounds and some furniture."

"Nice furniture ?"

"No," said Mr. Entwhistle.

Rosamund lost interest. "It's all very odd, isn't it ?" she said. "There was Cora, after the funeral, suddenly coming out with ' He uas murdered I ' and then, the very next day, sh goes and gets herself murdered ? I mean, it is odd, isn't it ?"

There was a moment's rather uncomfortable silence before Mr. Entwhistle said quietly:

"Yes, it is indeed very odd "

4

Mr.

Entwhistle studied Susan Banks as she leant forward across the table talking in her animated manner.

None

of the loveliness of Rosamund here. But it was an attractive face and its attraction lay, Mr. Entwhistle decided, in its vitality. The curves of the mouth were rich and full. It was a woman's mouth and her body was very decidedly a woman's---emphatically so. Yet in many ways Susan reminded him of her uncle, Richard Abernethie. The shape of her head, the line of her jaw, the deep-set reflective eyes. She had the same kind of dominant personality that Richard had had, the same driving energy, the same foresightedness and forthright judgment. Of the three members of the younger generation she alone seemed to be made of the metal that had raised up the vast Abernethie fortunes. Had Richard recognised in this niece a kindred spirit to his own ? Mr. Entwhistle thought he must have done. Richard had always had a keen appreciation of character. Here, surely, were .exactly the qualities of which he was in search. And yet, n his will, Richard Abernethie had made no distinction in her favour. Distrustful, as Mr. Entwhistle believed, of George, passing over that lovely dimwit, Rosamund--could he not have found in Susan what he was seeking--an heir of his own mettle ?

If not, the cause must be--yes, it followed logically--the husband ....

Mr. Entwhistle's eyes slid gently over Susan's shoulder to where Gregory Has stood absently whittling at a pencil. A thin, pale, ncadescript your},g man with reddish sandy hair. So overshadowed by Susan s colourful personality that it was difficult to realise what he himself was really like. Nothing to take h01d of in the fellow---quite pleasant, ready to be agreeablea "yes" man, as the modern term went. And yet that did not seem to describe him satisfactorily. There was something vaguely disquieting about the unobtrusiveness of Gregory Banks. He had been an unsuitable match--yet Susa had insisted on marrying him--had overborne all opposition--why ? What had she seen in him ? And now, six ronths after the marriage--" She's crazy about the fellow," Iix. Entwhistle said to himself. He knew the signs. A large umber of Wives with matrimonial troubles had passed through the office of Bollard, Entwhistle, Entwhistle and Bollard. Wives madly devoted to unsatisfactory and often what appeared quite unprepossessing husbands, wives contemptuous of, and bored by, apparently attractive and impeccable husbands. What any woman saw in some particular man was beyond the comprehension of the average intelligent male. It just was so. A woman who could be intelligent about everything else in the world could be a complete fool when it came to some particular man. Susan, thought Mr.

Entwhistle, was oe of those women. For her the world revolved around Grog. And that had its dangers in more ways than one.

Susan was talking with emphasis and indignation.

"--because it is disgraceful. You remember that woman who was murdered in Yorkshire last year ? Nobody was ever arrested. And the old woman in the sweet skop who was killed with a crowbar. They detained some man, and then th,e., let hi go.

There has to be evidence, my dear," said Mr. Entwhistle.

Susan paid no attention.

"And that other case---a retired nurse--that was a hatchet or an axe--just like Aunt Cora."

"Dear me, you appear to have made quite a study of these crimes, Susan," said Mr. Entwhistle mildly.

"Naturally one remembers these things--and when someone in one's own family is killed--and in very much the same way --well, it shows that there must be a lot of these sort of people going round the countryside, breaking into places and attacking lonely women--and that the police just don't bother I"

Mr. Entwhistle shook his head.

"Don't belittle the pohce, Susan. They are a very shrewd and patient body of men--persistent, too. Just because it isn't still mentioned in the newspapers doesn't mean that a

case is closed. Far from it."

"And yet there are hundreds of unsolved crimes every

year.

"Hundreds ?" Mr. Entwhistle looked dubious. "A

certain number, yes. But there are many occasions when the

olice know who has committed a crime but where the evidence

insufficient for a prosecution."

"I don't believe it," said Susan. "I believe if you knew

definitely who committed a crime you could always get the

evidence."

"I wonder now." Mr. Entwhistle sounded thoughtful. "I

ve,,ry, much wonder..."

Have they any idea at a/J--in Aunt Cora's case--of who it

might be ?"

"That I couldn't say. Not as far as I know. But they

would hardly confide in me--and it's early days yetmthe

murder took place only the day before yesterday, remember."

"It's definitely got to be a certain kind of person," Susan

mused. "A brutal, perhaps slightly half-witted type--a

discharged soldier or a gaol bird. I mean, using a hatchet

like that."

Looking slightly cuizzicl, Mr. Entwhistle raised his eyebrows

and murmurea:

"Lizzie Borden with an axe
Gave her father fifty whacks
When she saw what she had done
She gave her mother fifty-one."

"Oh," Susan flushed angrily, "C ora hadn't got any relations living with her--unless you mean the companion. And anyway Lizzie Borden was acquitted. Nob,,ody knows for certain she killed her father and stepmother.

"The rhyme is quite definitely libellous," Mr. Entwhistle agreed.

"You mean the companion did do it ? Did Cora leave her anything ?"

"An amethyst brooch of no great value and some sketches of fishing villages of sentimental value only."

"One has to have a motive for murdermunless one is half-witted."



Mr. Entwhistle gave a little chuckle.

"As far as one can see, the only person who had a motive is yo, my dear Susan."

"What's that ?" Greg moved forward suddenly. He was

like a sleeper coming awake. An ugly light showed in his eyes. He was suddenly no longer a negligible feature in the background. "What's Sue got to do with it ? What do you

mean--saying things like that ?"

Susan said sharply:

"Shut up, Greg. llr. Entwhistle doesn't mean any-thing--"

"Just my little joke," said Mr. Entwhistle apologetically. "Not in the best taste, I'm afraid. Cora left her estate, such as it was, to you, Susan. But to a young lady who has just inherited several hundred thousand pounds, an estate, amounting at the most to a few hundreds, can hardly be said to represent a motive for murder."

"She left her money to me ?" Susan sounded surprised. "How extraordinary. She didn't even know me ? Why did she do it, do you think ?"

"I think she had heard rum6urs that there had been a little difficulty---er---over your marriage." Greg, back again at sharpening his pencil, scowled. "There had been a certain amount of trouble over her own marriage---and I think she

experienced a fellow feeling."

Susan asked with a certain amount of interest:

"She married an artist, didn't she, whom none of the family liked ? Was he a good artist ?"

Mr. Entwhistle shook his head very decidedly.

"Are there amy of his paintings in the cottage ?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall judge for myself," said Susan.

Mr. Entwhistle smiled at the resolute tilt of Susan's chin.

"So be it. Doubtless I am an old fogey and hopelessly old-fashioned in matters of art, but I really don't think you will dispute my verdict."

"I suppose I ought to go down there, anyway ? And look over what there is. Is there anybody there now ?"

"I have arranged with Miss Gilchrist to remain there until further notice."

Greg said: "She must have a pretty good nerve--to stay in a cottage where a murder's been committed."

"Miss Gilchrist is quite a sensible woman, I should say.

Besides," added the lawyer dryly, "I don't think she has

anywhere else to go until she gets another situation."

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II,,

"So Aunt Cora's death left her high and dry ? Did she-- rere she and Aunt Cora---on intimate terms ?"

Mr. Entwhistle looked at her rather curiously, wondering just exactly what was in her mind.

"Moderately so, I imagine," he said. "She never treated

Miss Gilchrist as a servant."

"Treated her a damned sight worse, I dare say," said

Susan. "These wretched so called' ladies' are the ones who

get it taken out of them nowad, ays. I'll try and find her a

decent post somewhere. It won t be difficult. Anyone who's

willing to do a bit of housework and cook is worth their

weight in gold--she does cook, doesn't she ?"

"Oh yes. I gather it is something she called, er, 'th rough' that she objected to. I'm afraid I don't quite know

what ' the rough' is."

Susan appeared to be a good deal amused.

Mr. Entwhistle, glancing at his watch, said: "Your aunt left Timothy her executor."

"Timothy," said Susan with scorn. "Uncle Timothy is

practically a myth. Nobody ever sees him."

"Quite." Mr. Entwhistle glanced at his watch. "I am

travelling up to see him this afternoon. I will acquaint him

wi,th, your decision to go down to the cottage."

It will only take me a day or two, I imagine. I don't

want to be long away from London. I've got various schemes

In hand. I m going into busness.

Mr. Entwhistle looked round him at the cramped sitting-room

of the tiny flat. Greg and Susan were evidently hard up.

Her father, he knew, had run through most of his money. He

had left his daughter badly off.

"What are your plans for the future, if I may ask ?" "I've got my eye on some premises in Cardigan Street.

I suppose, if necessary, you can advance me some money ?

I may have to pay a deposit."

"That can be managed," said Mr. Entwhistle. "I rang you

up the day after the funeral several times but could get no

answer. I thought perhaps you might care for an advance.

I wondered whether you might perhaps have gone out of

Town.' '

"Oh no," said Susan quickly. "We were in all day. Both

of us. \Ve didn't go out at all."

Greg said gently: "You know, Susan, I think our telephone

must have been out of order that day. You remember how

I couldn't get through to Hard and Co. in the afternoon. I

meant to report it, but it was all right the next morning."

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"Teleph,o, nes," said Mr. Entwhistle," can be very unreliable

sometimes.'

Susan said suddenly:

"How did Aunt Cora know about our marriage ? It was

at a Registry Office and we didn't tell anyone until after

"I

fancy Richard may have told her about it. She remade

her will about three weeks ago (it was formerly in favour of

the Theosophical Society)--just about the time he had been

down to see her."

Susan looked startled.

"Did Uncle Richard go down to see her ? I'd no idea of

that ?"

"I hadn't any idea of it myself," said }lr. Entwhistle.

"So that was when

"When what ?"

"Nothing," said Susan.

## CHAPTER VI

"VERY GOOD of yOU to come along," said Maude gruffly, as she greeted Mr. Entwhistle on the platform of Bayham Compton station. "I can assure you that both Timothy and I much appreciate it. Of course the truth is that Richard's death was the worst thing possible for Timothy."

Mr. Entwhistle had not yet considered his friend's death from this particular angle. But it was, he saw, the only angle from which Mrs. Timothy Aberuethie was likely to regard it.

As they proceeded towards the exit, Maude developed the theme.

"To begin with, it was a shock--Timothy was really very attached to Richard. And then unfortunately it put the idea of death into Timothy's head. Being such an invalid has made him rather nervous about himself. He realised that he was the only one of the brothers left alive--and he started

saying that he'd be the next to go---and that it wouldn't be long now--all very morbid talk, as I told him."

They emerged from the station and Maude led the way to a dilapidated car of almost fabulous antiquity.

"Sorry about our old rattletrap," she said. "We've wanted a new car for years, but really we couldn't afford it. This has had a new engine twice--and these old cars really stand up to a lot of hard work.



"I hope it will start," she added. "Sometimes one has to wind it."

She pressed the starter several times but only a meaningless whirr resulted. Mr. Entwhistle, who had never wound a car in his life, felt rather apprehensive, but Maude herself de-scended, inserted the starting handle and with a vigorous couple of turns woke the motor to life. It was fortunate, Mr. Entwhistle reflected, that Maude was such a powerfully built woman.

"That's that," she said. "The old brute's been playing me up lately. Did it when I was coming back after the funeral. Had to walk a couple of miles to the nearest garage and they weren't good for muchmjust a village affair. I had to put up at the local inn while they tinkered at it. Of course that upset Timothy: too. I had to phone through to him and tell him I couldn t be back till the next day. Fussed him terribly. One tries to keep things from him as much as jpossible--but some things one can't do anything about--Cora s murder, for instance. I had to send for Dr. Barton to give him a sedative. Things like murder are too much for a man in Timothy's state of health. I gather Cora was always a fool."

Mr. Entwhistle digested this remark in silence. The infer-ence was not quite clear to him.

"I don't think I'd seen Cora since our marriage," said Maude. "I didn't like to say to Timothy at the time: ' Your

y

oungest sister's batty,' not just like that. But it's what thought. There she was saying the most extraordinary things t One didn't know whether to resent them or whether to laugh. I suppose the truth is she lived in a kind of imaginary world of her own--full of melodrama and fantastic ideas about

other people. Well, poor soul, she's paid for it now.

She

didn't have any proteges, did she ?"

"Proteges ? What do you mean ?"

"I just wondered. Some young cadging artist, or musician --or something of that kind. Someone she might have let in that day, and who killed her for her loose cash. Perhaps an adolescent--they're so queer at that age sometimes--especially if they're the neurotic arty type. I mean, it seems so odd to break in and murder her in the middle of the afternoon. If you break into a house surely you'd do it at night."

"There would have been two women there then."

"Oh yes, the companion. But really I can't believe that anyone would deliberately wait until she was out of the way and then break in and attack Cora. What for ? He can't have expected she'd have any cash or stuff to speak of, and

there must have been times when both the women were out and the house was empty. That would have been much safer. It seems so stupid to go and commit a murder unless it's absolutely necessary."

"And Cora's murder, you feel, was unnecessary ?"

°' It all seems so stupid."

Should murder make sense ? Mr. Entwhistle wondered.

Academically the answer was yes. But many pointless crimes were on record. It depended, Mr. Entwhistle reflected, on the mentality of the murderer.

What did he really know about murderers and their mental processes ? Very little. His firm had never had a criminal practice. He was no student of criminology himself. Murderers, as far as he could judge, seemed to be of all sorts and

kinds. Some had had over-weening vanity, some had had a lust 'for power, some, like Seddon, had been mean and avaricious, others, like Smith and Rowse had had an incredible fascination for women; some, like Armstrong, had been pleasant fellows to meet. Edith Thompson had lived in a world of violent unreality, Nurse Waddington had put her elderly patients out of the way with business-like cheerfulness.

Maude's voice broke into his meditations.

"If I could only keep the newspapers from Timothy! But he will insist on reading them--and then, of course, it upsets him. You do understand, don't you, Mr. Entwhistle, that there can be no question of Timothy's attending the

inquest ? If necessary, Dr. Barton can write out a certificate

or whatever it is."

"You can set your mind at rest about that."

"Thank goodness I"

They turned in through the gates of Stansfield Grange,

and up a neglected drive. It had been an attractive small

property once--but had now a doleful and neglected appear

ance. Maude sighed as she said:

"We had to let this go to seed during the war. Both

gardeners called up. And now we've only got one old man

--and he's not much good. Wages have gone up so terribly.

I must say it's a blessing to realise that we'll be able to spend

a little money on the place now. We're both so fond of it.

I was really afraid that we might have to sell it   Not

that

I suggested anything of the kind to Timothy. It would have upset him--dreadfully."

They

drew up before the portico of a very lovely old Georgian house which badly needed a coat of paint.

"No servants," said Maude bitterly, as she led the way in.



"Just a couple of women who come in. We had a resident maid until a month ago-slightly hunchbacked and terribly adenoidal and in many ways not too bright, but she was there which was such a comfort--and quite good at plain cooking.

And would you believe it, she gave notice and went to a fool of a woman who keeps six Pekinese dogs {it's a larger house than this and more work) because she was ' so fond of little doggies,' she said. Dogs, indeed! Being sick and making messes all the time I've no doubt! Really, these girls are mental I So there we are, and if I have to go out any afternoon,

Timothy is left quite alone in the houae and if anything should happen, how could he get help ? Though I do leave the telephone close by his chair so that if he felt faint he could dial Dr. Barton immediately."

Maude led the way into the drawing-room where tea was laid ready by the fireplace, and establishing Mr. Entwhistle there, disappeared, presumably to the back regions. She

returned in a few minutes' time with a teapot and silver kettle, and proceeded to minister to Mr. Entwhistle's needs. It was a good tea with home-made cake and fresh buns. Mr. Ent-whistle murmured:

"What about Timothy ?" and Maude explained briskly that she had taken Timothy his tray before she set out for the station.

"And now," said Maude, "he will have had his little nap and it will be the best time for him to see you. Do try and not let him excite himself too much."

Mr. Entwhistle assured her that he would exercise every precaution.

Studying her in the flickering firelight, he was seized by a feeling of compassion. This big, stalwart matter-of-fact woman, so healthy, so vigorous, so full of common sense, and

et so strangely, almost pitifully, vulnerable in one spot.

er love for her husband was maternal love, Mr. Entwhistle decided. Maude Abernethie had borne no child and she was a woman built for motherhood. Her invalid husband had become her child, to be shielded, guarded, watched over. And perhaps, being the stronger character of the two, she had unconsciously imposed on him a state of invalidism greater tha might otherwise have been the case.

"Poor Mrs. Tim," thought Mr. Entwhistle to himself.

"Good of you to come, Entwhistle."

Timothy raised himself up in Iris chair as he held out a hand.

He was a big man with a marked resemblance to his brother Richard. But what was strength in Richard, in Timothy was weakness. The mouth was irresolute, the chin very slightly receding, the eyes less deep-set. Lines of peevish irritability showed on his forehead.

His invalid status was emphasised by the rug across his knees and a positive pharmacopoeia of little bottles and boxes on a table at his right hand.

"I mustn't exert myself," he said warningly. "Doctor's forbidden it. Keeps telling me not to worry! Worry! If he'd had a murder in his family he'd do a bit of worrying, I bet l It's too much for a man first Richard's death---then hearing all about his funeral and his will what a will !--and on top of that poor little Cora killed with a hatchet. Hatchet I Ugh! This country's full of gangsters nowadays--thugs---left over from the war! Going about killing defenceless women. Nobody's got the guts to put these things down--to take a strong hand. What's the country coming to, I'd like to know ? What's the damned country coming to ?"

Mr. Entwhistle was familiar with this gambit. It was a question almost invariably asked sooner or later by his clients for the last twenty years and he had his routine for answering it. The non-committal words he uttered could have been classified under the heading of soothing noises.

"It all began with that damned Labour Government," said Timothy. "Sending the whole country to blazes. And the Government we've got now is no better. Mealy-mouthed: milk-and-water socialists I Look at the state ws're in I Can't get a decent gardener, can't get servants--poor Maude here has to work herself to a shadow messing about in the kitchen (by the way, I think a custard pudding would go well with the sole to-night, my dear--and perhaps a little clear soup first ?). I've got to keep my strength up--Doctor Barton said so--let me see, where was I ? Oh yes, Cora. It's a shock, I can tell you, to a man, when he hears his sister--his own sister--has been murdered I Why, I had palpitations for twenty minutes I You'll have to attend to everything for me, Entwhistle. I can't go to the inquest or be bothered by business of any kind connected with Cora's estate. I want to forget the whole thing. What happens, by the way, to Cora's share of Richard's money ? Comes to me, I suppose ?"



Murmuring something about clearing away tea, Maude

left the room.

Timothy lay hack in his chair and said:

"Good thing to get rid of the women. Now we can talk business without any silly interruptions."

"The sum left in trust for Cora," said Mr. Entwhistle, "goes equally to you and the nieces and 'iel)hew."

"But look here," Timothy's cheeks assum'ed a purplish hue of indignation. "Surely I'm her next of kin ? Only surviving brother."

Mr. Entwhistle explained with some care the exact provi sions of Richard Abernethie's will, reminding Timothy gently that he had had a copy sent him.

"Don't expect me to understand all that legal jargon, do you ?" said Timothy ungratefully. "You lawyers I Matter of fact, I couldn't believe it when Maude Came home and told

me the gist of it. Thought she'd got it Wrong. Women are never clear headed. Best woman in the world, Maude--but women don't understand finance. I dcn't believe Mande even realises that if Richard hadn't died when he did, we might have had to clear out of here. Fact I"

"Surely if you had applied to Richard------"

,T, imot,h,y gave a short bark of harsh laughter.

' That s not my style. Our father left us all a perfectly reasonable share of his money--that is, if we didn't want to go into the family concern. I didn't. I've a soul above corn-plasters, Entwhistle I Richard took my attitude a bit hard. Well, what with taxes, depreciation of income, one thing and another--it hasn't been easy to keep things going. I've

had to realise a good deal of capital. Best thing to do these days. I did hint once to Richard that this place was getting a bit hard to run. He took the attitude that we'd be much better off in a smaller place altogether. Easier for Maude, he said, more labour saving---labour saving, what a term I Oh no, I wouldn't have asked Richard for help. But I can tell you, Entwhistle, that the worry affected my health most unfavourably. A man in my state of health oughtn't to have to worry. Then Richard died and though of course naturally I was cut up about it--my brother and all that--I couldn't help feeling relieved about future prospects. Yes, it's all plain sailing now--and a great relief. Get the house painted--get a couple of really good men on the gardenyou can get them

at a price. Restock the rose garden completely.

And--

where was I.

"

"Detailing your future plans."

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"Yes, yes--but I mustn't bother you with all that. What did hurt me--and hurt me cruelly--were the terms of Richard's will."

"Indeed ?" Mr. Entwhistle looked inquiring. "They were not--as you expected ?"

"I should say they weren't I Naturally, after lortimer's death, I assumed that Richard would leave everything to

"Ah--did he---ever--indicate that to you ?"

"He never said so---not in so many words. Reticent sort of chap, Richard. But he asked himself here--not long after Mortimer's death. Wanted to talk over family affairs generally. We discussed young George--and the girls and their husbands. Wanted to know my views--not that I could tell him much. I'm an invalid and I don't get about, and Maude and I live out of the world. Rotten silly marriages both of those girls made, if you ask me. Well, I ask you, Entwhistle, naturally I thought he was consulting me as the

head of the family after he was gone and naturally I thought the control of the money would be mine. Richard could surely trust me to do the right thing by the younger generation. And to look after poor old Cora. Dash it all, Ent-whistle, I'm an Abernethie---the last Abernethie. Full control should have been left in my hands."

In his excitement Timothy had kicked aside his rug and had sat up in his chair. There were no signs of weakness or fragility about him. He looked, Mr. Entwhistle thought, a perfectly healthy man, even if a slightly excitable one. Moreover the old lawyer realised very clearly that Timothy Abernethie had probably always been secretly jealous of his brother Richard. They had been sufficiently alike for Timothy to resent his brother's strength of character and firm grasp of affairs. When Richard had died, Timothy had exulted in the prospect of succeeding at this late date to the power to control the destinies of others.

Richard Abernethie had not given him that power. Had he thought of doing so and then decided against it ?

A sudden squalling of cats in the garden brought Timothy up out of his chair. Rushing to the window he threw up the sash, bawled out "Stop it, you l" and picking up a large book hurled it out at the marauders.

; "Beastly cats," he grumbled, returning to his visitor.

"Ruin the flower beds and I can't stand that damned yowling."

He sat down again and asked:

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"Have a drink, Entwhistie ?"

"Not quite so soon. Maude has just given me an excellent tea."

Timothy grunted.

"Capable woman, Maude. But she does too much. Even has to muck about with the inside of that old car of ours--she's quite a mechanic in her way, you know."

"I hear she had a breakdown coming back from the funeral ?"

"Yes. Car conked out. She had the sense to telephone through about it, in case I should be anxious, but that ass of a daily woman of ours wrote down the message in a way that didn't make sense. I was out getting a bit of fresh air--I'm advised by the doctor to take what exercise I can if I feel like it--I got back from my walk to find scrawled on a bit of paper: ' Madam's sorry car gone wrong got to stay night.' Naturally I thought she was still at Enderby. Put a call through and found Maude had left that morning. Might have had the breakdown anywhere I Pretty kettle of fish I Fool of a daily woman only left me a lumpy macaroni cheese for supper. I had to go down to the kitchen and warm it up myself--and make myself a cup of tea--to say nothing of stoking the

boiler. I might have had a heart attack--but does that class of woman care ? Not she ? With any decent feelings she'd have come back that evening and looked after me properly. No loyalty any more in the lower classes

"

He brooded sadly.

"I don't know how much Maude told you about the funeral and the relatives," said Mr. Entwhistle. "Cora produced rather an awkward moment. Said brightly that Richard had been murdered, hadn't he ? Perhaps Maude told you."

Timothy chuckled easily.

"Oh yes, I heard about that. Everybody looked down their noses and pretended to be shocked. Just the sort of thing Cora would say I You know how she always managed to put her foot in it when she was a girl, Entwhistle ? Said something at our wedding that upset Maude, I remember. llaude never cared for her very much. Yes, Maude rang me up that evening after the funeral to know if I was all right and if Mrs. Jones had come in to give me my evening meal and then she told me it had all gone off very well, and I said ' What about the will ? ' and she tried to hedge a bit, but of course I had the truth out of her. I couldn't believe it, and I said she must have made a mistake, but she stuck to it. It hurt me, Entwhistle--it really wonded me, if you know what

I mean. If you ask me, it was just spite on Richard's part.

! know o,,ne shouldn't speak ill of the dead, but, upon my

word--

Timothy continued on this theme for some time.

Then Maude came back into the room and said firmly:

"! think, dear, Mr. Entwhistle has been with you quite
long enough.
You really must rest. If you have settled

everything
"

"Oh, we've settled things. I leave it all to you, Entwhistle.
Let me know when they catch the fellow--if they ever do.
I've no faith in the police nowadays--the Chief Constables
aren't the right type. You'll see to the--er--interment--won't
you ? We shan't be able to come, I'm afraid. But
order an expensive wreath--and there must be a proper stone
tt up in due course-she'll be buried locally, I suppose ?

point in bringing her North and I've no idea where

Lansquenet is buried, somewhere in France I believe. I don't know what one puts on a stone when it's murder Can't very well say ' entered into rest ' or anything like that. One will have to choose a text--something appropriate. R.I.P. ? No, that's only for Catholics."

"0 Lord, thou hast seen my wrong. Judge thou my case," murmured Mr. Entwhistle.

The startled glance Timothy bent on him made Mr. Ent-whistle smile faintly.

"From Lamentations," he said. "It seems appropriate if somewhat melodramatic. However, it will be some time before the question of the Memorial stone comes up. The--er --ground has to settle, you know. Now don't worry about anything. We will deal with things and keep you fully informed."

Mr. Entwhistle left for London by the breakfast train on the following morning.

When he

got home, after a little hesitation, he rang up a friend

of his.

## CHAPTER VII

I CAN'T

tell you how much I appreciate your invitation." Mr. Entwhistle

pressed his host's hand warmly.

Hercule Poirot

gestured hospitably to a chair by the fire. Mr. Entwhistle

sighed as he sat down.

On one

side of the room a table was laid for two.



"I returned from the country this morning," he said.

"And you have a matter on which you wish to consult

rile ? '

"Yes. It's a long rambling story, I'm afraid."

"Then we will not have it until after we have dined.

Georges ?"

The efficient George materialised with some Pdtd de Foie Gras

accompanied by hot toast in a napkin.

"We will have our Ptltd by the fire," said Poirot. "After
wards we will move to the table."

It was an hour and a half later that Mr. Entwhistle stretched

himself comfortably out in his chak and sighed a contented

sigh.

"You certainly know how to do yourself well, Poirot.

Trust a Frenchman."

"I am a Belgian. But the rest of your remark applies.

At my age the chief pleasure, almost the only pleasure that still
remains, is the pleasure of the table.

Mercifully I have an

excellent stomach."

"Ah," murmured Mr. Entwhistle.

They had dined off Sole Veronique, followed by Escalope de Veau Milanaise, proceeding to Poire Flambde with ice-cream. They had drunk a Pouilly Fuisse followed by a Corton, and a very good port now reposed at Mr. Entwhistle's elbow. Poirot, who did not care for port, was sipping Crgme de Cacao.

"I don't know," murmured Mr. Entwhistle reminiscently, "how you manage to get hold of an escalope like that [ It melted in the mouth I"

"I have a friend who is a Continental butcher. For him I solve a small domestic problem. He is appreciative--and ever since then he is most sympathetic to me in the matter of the stomach."

"A domestic problem." lr. Entwhistle sighed. "I wish you had not reminded me... This is such a perfect moment..."

"Prolong it, my friend. We will have presently the demi tasse and the fine brandy, and then, when digestion is peacefully under way, the.n you shall tell why you need my advice."

The clock struck the half hour after nine before Mr. Ent-whistle stirred in his chair. The psychological moment had come. He no longer felt reluctant to bring forth his per-plexities--he was eager to do so.

"I don't know," he said," whether I'm making the most

colossal fool of myself. In any case I don't see that there's



anything that can possibly be done. But I'd like to put the facts before you, and I'd like to know what you think."

He paused for a moment or two, then in his dry meticulous way, he told his story. His trained legal brain enabled him to put the facts clearly, to leave nothing out, and to add nothing extraneous. It was a clear succinct account, and as suctx appreciated by the little elderly man with the egg; shaped head who sat listening to him.

When he had finished there was a pause. Mr. Entwhistle was prepared to answer questions, but for some few moments no question came. Hercule Poirot was reviewing the evidence.

I-Ie said at last:

"It seems very clear. You have in your mind the suspicion that your friend, Richard Abernethie, may have been murdered ? That suspicion, or assumption, rests on the basis of one thing only--t,hwords spoken by Cora Lansqu,net at Richard Abernthi s funeral. Take those away--and there is nothing left. The fact that she herself was murdered the day afterwards may be the purest coincidence. It is true that Richard Abernethie died suddenly, but he was attended by a reputable doctor who knew him well, and that doctor had no

suspicions and gave a death certificate. Was Richard buried or cremated ?"

"Cremated--according to his own request."

"Yes, that is the law. And it means that a second doctor signed the certificate--but there would be no difficulty about that. So we come back to the essential point, whaJ Cort Lansqunt said. You were there and you heard her. She said: ' But he was murdered, wasn't he ? '"

"Yes."

"And the real point is--that you believe she was speaking the truth."

The lawyer hesitated for a moment, then he said: "Yes, I do."

"Why?"

"Why ?" Entwhistle repeated the word, slightly puzzled.

"But yes, why ? Is it because, already, deep down, you had an uneasiness about the manner of Richard's death ?"

The lawyer shook his head. "No, no, not in the least."

"Then it is because of hr---of Cora herself. You knew her well ?"

"I had not seen her for--oh---over twenty years."

"Would you have known her if you had met her in the street ?"

Mr. Entwhistle reflected.

"I might have passed her by in the street without recognising her. She was a thin slip of a girl when I saw her last and she had turned into a stout, shabby, middle-aged woman. But I think that the moment I spoke to her face to face I should have recognised her. She wore her hair in the same way, a bang cut straight across the forehead and she had a trick of peering up at you through her fringe like a rather shy animal, and she had a very characteristic, abrupt way of talking, and a way of putting her head on one side and then coming out with something quite outrageous. She had character, you see, and character is always highly individual."

"She was, in fact, the same Cora you had known years ago. And she still said outrageous things! The things, the outrageous things, she had said in the past--were they usually--justified ?"

"That was always the awkward thing about Cora. When truth would have been better left unspoken, she spoke it."

"And that characteristic remained unchanged. Richard Abernethie was murdered--so Cora at once mentioned the fact."

Mr. Entwhistle stirred.

"You think he was murdered ?"

"Oh, no, no, my friend, we cannot go so fast. We agree on this--Cora thought he had been murdered. She was quite sure he had been murdered. It was, to her, more a certainty than a surmise. And so, we come to this, she must have had

some reason for the belief. We agree, by your knowledge of her, that it was not just a bit of mischief making. Now tell me--when she said what she did, there was, at once, a kind of chorus of protest--that is right ?"

"Quite right."

"And she then became confused, abashed, and retreated from the position--saying--as far as you can remember, something like ' But I thought from what he told me '" The lawyer nodded.

"I wish I could remember more clearly. But I am fairly sure of that. She used the words 'he told me' or 'he said' "

"And the matter was then smoothed over and everyone spoke of something else. You can remember, looking back, no s.pecial expression on anyone's face ? Anything that remains in your memory as shall we say--unusual ?"

"And the very next day, Cora is killed---and you ask yourself :. ' Can it Be cause and effect ? '"

The lawyer stirred.

"I suppose that seems to you quite fantastic ?"

"Not at all," said Poirot. "Given that the original assumption is correct, it is logical. The perfect murder, the murder of Richard Abernethie, has been committed, all has gone oft

smoothly--and suddenly it appears that there is one person

who has a knowledge of the truth I Clearly that person must

be silenced as quickly as possible."

"Then you do think that it was murder ?"

Poirot said gravely:

"I think, mon cher, exactly as you thought that there

is a case for investigation. Have you taken any steps ? You

have spoken of these matters to the police ?"

"No." Mr. Entwhistle shook his head. "It did not seem

to me that any good purpose could be achieved. My position

is that I represent the family. If Richard Abernethie was

murdered, there seems only one method by which it could be

done.

"By poison ?"

"Exactly. And the body has ben cremated. There is now

no evidence available. But I decided that I, myself, must be

satisfied on the point. That is why, Pokot, I have come to

yOU."

"Who was in the house at the time of his death ?"

"An old butler who has been with him for years, a cook and a housemaid. It would seem, perhaps, as though it must

necessarily be one of theme"

"Ah! do not try to pull the wool upon my eyes. This

Cora, she knows Richard Abernethie was killed, yet she acquiesces ',m the hushing up. She says ' I think you are all

quite right. Therefore t must be one of the family who is

concerned, someone whom the victim himself might prefer

not to have openly accused. Otherwise, since Cora was fond

of her brother, she would not agree to let the sleeping murderer

lie:, You agree to that, yes ?"

It was the way I reasoned--yes," confessed Mr. Ent-

whistle. "Though how any of the family could possibly"

Poirot cut him.short.

"Where poison is concerned there axe all sorts of possibilities.

It must, presumably, have been a narcotic of some

sort if he died in his sleep and if there were no suspicious

appearances. Possibly he was already having some narcotic

administered to him. '

"In any case," said Mr. Entwhistle, "the how hardly

matters. We shall never be able to prove anything."

"In the case of Richard Abernethie, no. But the murder

of Cora Lansquenet is different. Once we know ' who' then

evidence ought to be possible to get." He added with a sharp

glance, "You have, perhaps, already done something."

"Very little. My purpose was mainly, I think, elimination. It is distasteful to me to think that one of the Abernethie

family is a murderer. I still can't quite believe it. I hoped

that by a few apparently idle questions I could exonerate

certain members of the family beyond question. Perhaps,

who knows, all of them ? In which case, Cora would have

been wrong in her assumption and her own death could be

ascribed to some casual prowler who broke in. After all, the issue is very simple. What were the members of the Abernethie family doing on the afternoon that Cora Lansquenet was killed ?"

"Eh bien," said Poirot, "what were they doing ?"

"George Crossfield was at Hurst Park races. Rosamund Shane was out shopping in London. Her husband--for one must include husbands "

"Assuredly."

"Her husband was fixing up a deal about an option on a play, Susan and Gregory Banks were at home all day. Timothy Abernethie, who is an invalid, was at his home in Yorkshire, and his wife was driving herself home from Enderby."

He stopped.

Hercule Poirot looked at him and nodded comprehendingly. "Yes, that is what they say. And is it all true ?"

"I simply don't know, Poirot. Some of the statements are capable of proof or disproof--but it would be difficult to do so without showing one's hand pretty plainly. In fact to do so would be tantamount to an accusation. I will simply tell you certain conclusions of my own. George may have been at Hurst Park races, but I do not think he was. He was rash enough to boast that he had backed a couple of winners. It is my experience that so many offenders against the law ruin their own case by saying too much. I asked him the name of the winners, and he gave the names of two horses without any

apparent hesitation. Both of them, I found, had been heavily tipped on the day in question and one had duly won. The other, though an odds on favourite, had unaccountably failed even to get a place."

"Interesting. Had this George any urgent need for money at the time of his uncle's death ?"

"It is my impression that his need was very urgent. I have no evidence for saying so, but I strongly suspect that



he has been speculating with kis clients' funds and that he was in danger of prosecution. It is only my impression but I have some experience in these matters. Defaulting solici tors, I regret to say, are not entirely uncommon. I can only tell you that I would not have cared to entrust my own funds to George, and I suspect that Richard Abernethie, a very shrewd judge of men, was dissatisfied with his nephew and placed no reliance on him.

"His mother," the lawyer continued, "was a good-looking, rather foolish girl and she married a man of what I should call dubious character." He sighed. "The Abernethie girls were not good choosers."

I-Ie paused and then went on:

"As for Rosamund, she is a lovely nitwit. I really cannot see her smashing Cora's head in with a hatchet I Her husband, Michael Shane, is something of a dark horse--he's a man with ambition and also a man of overweening vanity I should say. But really I know very little about him. I have no reason to suspect him of a brutal crime or of a carefully planned poison ing, but until I know that he really,was doing what he says he was doing I cannot rule him out.'

"But you have no doubts about the wife ? '

"No--no--there is a certain rather startling callousness...

but no, I really cannot envisage the hatchet. She is a fragile

looking creature."

"And beautiful I" said Poirot with a faint cynical smile.

"And the other niece ?"

"Susan ? She is a very different type from Rosamund--a

girl of remarkable ability, I should say. She and her husband

were at home together that day. I said (falsely) that I had

tried to get them on the telephone on the afternoon in question.

Greg said very quickly that the telephone had been out of

order all day. He had tried to get someone and fa[led."

"So again it is not conclusive You

cannot eliminate

as

you hoped to do  What is

the husband like ?"

"I find

him hard to make out. He has a somewhat unpleasing personality

though one cannot say exactly why he

makes this

impression. As for Susan"

"Yes ?"

"Susan reminds me of her uncle. She has the vigour, the

drive, the mental capacity of Richard Abernethie. It may be

my fancy that she lacks some of the kindliness and the warmth

of my old friend."

"Women are never kind," remarked Poirot. "Though they

can sometimes be tender. She loves her husband ?"

"Devotedly, I should say. But really, Poirot, I can't

believeI won't believe for one moment that Susan "

"You prefer George ?" said Poirot. "It is natural I As

for me, I am not so sentimental about beautiful young ladies.

Now tell me about your visit to the older generation ?"

Mr. Entwhistle described his visit to Timothy and Maude

at some length. Poirot summarised the result.

"So Mrs. Abernethie is a good mechanic. She knows all about the inside of a car. And Mr. Abernethie is not the invalid he likes to think himself. He goes out for walks and is, according to you, capable of vigorous action. He is also a bit of an ego maniac and he resented his brother's success and superior character."

"He spoke very affectionately of Cora."

"And ridiculed her silly remark after the funeral. What of the sixth beneficiary ?"

"Helen ? Mrs. Leo ? I do not suspect her for a moment. In any case, her innocence will be easy to prove. She was at Enderby. With three servants in the house."

"Eh bien, my friend," said Poirot. "Let us be practical.

Vvat do you want me to do ?"

"I want to know the truth, Poirot."

"Yes. Yes, I should feel the same in your place."

"And you're the man to find it out for me. I know you

don't take cases any more, but I ask you to take this one.

This is a matter of business. I will be responsible for your

fees. Come now, money is always useful."

Poirot grinned.

"Not if it all goes in the taxes I But I will admit, your

problem interests me I Because it is not easy It

is all so

nebulous

.... One thing, my friend, had better be done by you. After

that, I will occupy myself of everything. But I think it

will be best if you yourself seek out the doctor who
attended Mr.
Richard Abernethie. You know him ?" "Slightly."
"What
is
he like ?"
"Middle-aged G.P.
Quite competent. On very friendly terms with
Richard. A thoroughly good fellow."
"Then seek
him out. He will speak more freely to you than to
me. Ask him about Mr. Abernethie's illness. Find out what
medicines Mr. Abernethie was taking at the time of his death
and before. Find out if Richard Abernethie ever said anything
to his doctor about fancying himself being poisoned. By
the way, this Miss Gilchrist is sure that he used the term poisoned in talking to his sister ?"



Mr. Entwhistle reflected.

"It was the word she usedwbut she is the type of witness
who often changes the actual words used, because she is con-vinced
she is keeping to the sense of them. If Richard had
said he was afraid someone wanted to kill him, Miss Gilchrist
might have assumed poison because she connected his fears

with those of an aunt of hers who thought her food was being tampered with. I can take up the point with her again some time."

"Yes. Or I will do so." He paused and then said in a different voice: "Has it occurred to you, my f,ri,e, nd, that your Miss Gilchrist may be in some danger herself ?

Mr.

Entwhistle looked surprised.

can't say that it had."

"But, yes. Cora voiced her suspicions on the day oI the funeral. The question in the murderer's mind will be, did she voice them to anybody when she first heard of Richard's death ? And the most likely person for her to have spoken to about them will be Miss Gilchrist. I think, on char, that

she had better not remain alone in that cottage."

"I believe Susan is going down."

"Ah, so Mrs. Banks is going down ?"

"She wants to look through Cora's things."

"I see... I see... Well, my friend, do what I have

asked of you. You might also prepare Mrs. AbernethieMrs. Leo Abernethie, for the possibility that I may arrive in the house. We will see. From now on I occupy myself of every-thing."

And Poirot twirled his moustaches with enormous energy.

## CHAPTER VIII

MR. ENTWHISTLE looked at Dr. Larraby though, tfully.

He had had a lifetime of experience in summing people up. There had been frequent occasions on which it had been necessary to tackle a difficult situation or a delicate subject. Mr. Entwhistle was an adept by now in the art of how exactly to make the proper approach. How would it be best to tackle Dr. Larraby on what was certainly a very difficult subject and one which the doctor might very well resent as reflecting upon his own professional skill ?

Frankness, Mr. Entwhistle thought---or at least a modified frankness. To say that suspicions had arisen because of a

haphazard suggestion thrown out by a silly woman would be

RI-advised. Dr. Larraby had not known Cora.

Mr. Entwhistle cleared his throat and plunged br,,avely. "I want to consult you on a very delicate matter,' he said. "You may be offended, but I sincerely hope not. You are a

sensible man and you will realise, I'm sure, that a--er--preposterous

suggestion is best dealt with by finding a reasonable

answer and not by condemning it out of hand. It

concerns my client, the late Mr. Abernethie. I'll ask you my

question flat out. Are you certain, absolutely ctain, that he died what is termed a natural death ?"

Dr. Larraby's good-humoured, rubicund middle-aged face

turned in astonishment on his questioner.

"What on earth

Of course he did. I gave a certificate,

didn't I ? If I hadn't been satisfied "

Mr. Entwhistle cut in adroitly:

"Naturally, naturally. I assure you that I am not assuming

anything to the contrary. But I would be glad to have your

positive assurance--in face of the--er--rurnours that are

flying around."

"Rumours ? What rnmours ?"

"One doesn't know quite how these things start," said Mr. Entwhistle mendaciously. "But my feeling is that they should be stopped--authoritatively, if possible."

"Abernethie was a sick man. He was suffering from & disease that would have proved fatal within, I should say, at the earliest, two years. It might have come much sooner. His son's death had weakened his will to live, and his powers of resistance. I admit that I did not expect his death to come so soon, or indeed so suddenly, but there are precedents--plenty of precedents. Any medical man who predicts exactly when a patient will die, or exactly how long he will live, is bound to make a fool of himself. The human factor is always

incalculable. The weak have often unexpected powers of resistance, the strong sometimes succumb."

"I understand all that. I am not doubting your diagnosis. Mr. Abernethie was, shall we say (rather melodramaticallr, I'm afraid) under sentence of death. All I'm asking you s, is it quite impossible that a man, knowing or suspecting that he is doomed, might of his own accord shorten that period of life ? Or that someone else might do it for him ?"

Dr. Larraby frowned.

"Suicide, you mean ? Abernethie wasn't a suicidal type."

"I see. You can assure me, medically speaking, that such a suggestion is impossible."

The doctor stirred uneasily.

"I wouldn't use the word impossible. After his son's death life no longer held the interest for Abernethie that it had done. I certa/nly don't feel that suicide is likely--but I can't say that it's impossible."

"You are speaking from the psychological angle. When I said medically, I really meant; do the circumstances of his death make such a suggestion impossible ?"

"No, oh no. No, I can't say that. He died in his sleep, as people often do. There was no reason to suspect suicide, no evidence of his state of mind. If one were to demand an autopsy e, yery time a man who is seriously ill died in his sleep

The doctor's face was getting redder and redder. Mr. Entwhistle hastened to interpose.

"Of course. Of course. But if there had been evidence--evidence of which you yourself were not aware ? If, for instance, he had said something to someone "

"Indicating that he was contemplating suicide ? Did he ? I must say it surprises me."

"But if it wers so--my case is purely hypothetical-could you rule out the possibility ?"

,D,r. Larraby said slowly:

No--no---I could not do that. But I say again, I should be very much surprised."

,,Mr. Entwhistle hastened to follow up his advantage.

If, then, we assume that his death was not natural-all this is purely hypothetical--what could have caused it ? What kind of a drug, I mean ?"

"Several. Some kind of a narcotic would be indicated. There was no sign of cyanosis, the attitude was quite peaceful."

"He had sleeping draughts or pills ? Something of that kind."

"Yes. I had prescribed Slumberyl--a very safe and dependable hypnotic. He did not take it every night. And he

only had a small bottle of tablets at a time. Three or even four times the prescribed dose would not have caused death. In fact, I remember seeing the bottle on his wash-stand after his death still nearly full."

"What else had you prescribed for him ?"

"Various things--a medicine containing a small quantity of morphia to be taken when he had an attack of pain. Some vitamin capsules. An indigestion mixture."

Mr. Entwhistle interrupted.



"Vitamin capsules ? I think I was once prescribed a course of those. Small round capsules of gelatine."

"Yes. Containing adexoline."

"Could anything else have been introduced intosay---one of those capsules ?"

"Something lethal, you mean ?" The doctor was looking

mo, re,a,nd me ,surprised. "But surely no man would ever

--look acre, ncwhistle, what are ,ou getting at ? My God,

man, are you suggestinmurder ? '

"I don't quite know 'what I'm,suggesting I

just want

to

know what would be possible.

"But what evidence have you for even suggesting such a

t]

g ?"

"I haven't any evidence," said Mr. Entwhistle in a

tired

voice. "Ma-. Abernethie is dead--and the person to whom

he

spoke is also dead. The whole thing is turnout--vague,

un satisfactory

rumour, and I want to scotch it if I can.

If

you tell me that no one could possibly have poisoned

Aber nethie

in any way whatsoever, I'll be delighted l It

would

be a big weight off my mind, I can assure

you."

,D,r. La,?b,y' got up.

and walked up and down. ,

· can t ten you what you want me to

tell you, ' he said at last. "I wish I could. Of

course it could have been done. Anybody could have extracted

the oil from a capsule and replaced it with--say--pure

nicotine or half a dozen other things. Or something could have

been put in his food or drink

? Isn't that more likely ?"

"Possibly. But you see,

there were only the servants in the house when he died--and

I don't think it was any of them--in fact I'm quite

sure it wasn't. So I'm looking for

some delayed

action possibility. There's no drug, I suppose, that ,o,u

can

administer and then the person dies weeks later

"A convenient idea--but untenable, I'm afraid," said the

doctor dryly. "I know you're a responsible person, Ent-whistle, but who is making this suggestion

? It seems to me wildly far fetched."

- "Abernethie never

said anything to you ? Never hinted that .o,n,e of his relations

might be

wanting him out of the way

t

The doctor looked at him curiously.

' No, he never said

anythh}g to me. Are you sure, Ent~ whistle, that

somebody hasn t been--well, playing up the sensational ?

Some hysterical subjects can give an appearance of

being

quite

reasonable

and

normal,

you

know."



"I hope it was like that. It might well be."

"Let me understand. Someone claims that Abernethie

told her--it was a woman, I,,suppose ?"

"Oh yes, it was a woman.

"--told her that someone was trying to kill him ?"

Cornered, Mr. Entwhistle reluctantly told the tale of Cora's

remark at the funeral. Dr. Larraby's face lightened.

"My dear fellow. I shouldn't pay any attentionl The

explanation is quite simple. The woman's at a certain .time

of life--craving for sensation, unbalanced, unreliable--might

· wi"

say anything. They do, you kno ,

Mr. Entwhistle resented the doctor s easy assumption. He

himself had had to deal with plenty of sensation-hunting and

hysterical women.

"Yomay be quite right," he said, rising., "Unfortunately we can t tackle her on the subject, as she s been murdered

herself."

"What's that--murdered ?" Dr. Larraby looked as though

he had grave suspicions of Mr. Entwhistle's own stability of

mind.

"You've probably read about it in the paper. Mrs. Lam-quenet

at Lytchett St. Mary in Berkshire."

"Of course--I'd no idea she was a relation of Richard

Abernethie's I" Dr. Larraby was looking quite shaken.

Feeling that he had revenged himself for the doctor's

professional superiority, and unhappily conscious that his own

suspicions had not been assuaged as a result of the visit,

Mr. Entwhistle took his leave.

Back at Enderby, Mr. Entwhistle decided to talk to

Lanscombe.

He started by asking the old butler what his plans were. "Mrs. Leo has asked me to stay on here until the house is

sold, sir, and I'm sure I shall be very pleased to oblige her. We are all very fond of Mrs. Leo." He sighed. "I feel it very much, sir, if you will excuse me mentioning it, that the house has to be sold. I've known it for so very many y. ears, and seen all the young ladies and gentlemen grow up in it. I always thought that Mr. Mortimer would come after his father and perhaps bring up a family here, too. It was arranged, sir, that I should go to the North Lodge when I got



ast doing my work here. A very nice little place, the North odge--and I look.e,d forward to having it very spick and span. But I suppose that s all over now."

"I'm afraid so, Lanscombe. The estate will all have to be,sold t,o, gether. But with your legaclr "

Oh I m not complaining, sir, aha I'm very sensible of Mr. Abernethie'sgenerosity. I'm well provided for, but it's not so easy to finda little place to buy nowadays and though my married niece has asked me to make my home with them, well, it won',t, be quite the same thing as living on the estate."

"I know, said Mr. Entwhistle. "It's a hard new world for us old fellows. I wish I'd seen more of my old friend before he went. How did he seem those last few months ?"

"Well, he wasn't himself, sir. Not since Mr. Mortimer's

death."

"No, it broke him up. And then he was a sick man--sick men have strange fancies sometimes. I imagine Mr. Abernethie suffered from that sort of thing in his last days. He spoke of enemies sometimes, of somebody wishing to do him harm--perhaps ? He may even have thought his food was being tampered with ?"

Old Lanscombe looked surprised--surprised and offended. "I cannot recall anything of that kind, sir."

Entwhistle looked at him keenly.

"You're a very loyal servant, Lanscombe, I know that. But such fancies, on Mr. Abernethie's part would be quite--er --unimportant--a natural symptom in some---er diseases."

"Indeed, sir ? I can only say Mr. Abernethie never said anything like that to me, or in my hearing."

Mr. Entwhistle slid gently to another subject.

"He had some of his family down to stay with him, didn't he, before he died. His nephew and his two nieces and their husbands ?"

"Yes, sir, that is so."

"Was he satisfied with those visits ? Or was he disappointed ?"

Lanscombe's eyes became remote, his old back stiffened. "I really could not say, sir."

"I think you could, you know," said Mr. Entwhistle gently.

"It's not your place to say anything of that kind--that's what you really mean. But there are times when one has to

do violence to one's sense of what is fitting. I was one of your
master's oldest friends. I cared for him very much. So did
you. That's why I'm asking you for your opinion as a man, not as a butler."



Lanscombe was s/lent for a moment, then he said /n a
colourless voice:

"Is there anything--wrong, sir ? 'j

Mr. Entwhistle replied truthfully.

"I don't know," he said. "I hope not. I would like to
make sure. Have you yourself felt that something was--wrong
? °'

"Only since the funeral, sir. And I couldn't say exactly
what it is. But Mrs. Leo and M-rs. Timothy, too, they didn,t,
seem quite themselves that evening after the others had gone.

"You know the contents of the will ?"

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Leo thought I would like to know. It
seemed to me, if I may permit myself to comment, a very fair

"Yes, it was a fair will. Equal benefits. But it is not, I

think, the will that Mr. Abernethie orig/nally intended to

make after his son died. W/II you answer now the question

that I asked you just now ?"

"As a matter of personal opinion

"

"Yes, yes, that is understood."

"The master, sir, was very much disappointed after Mr. George had been here He had hoped, I think, that Mr. George might resemble Mr. Mortimer. Mr. George, if I may say so, did not come up to standard. Miss Laura's husband was always considered unsatisfactory, and I'm afraid Mr. George took after him." Lanscombe paused and then went on, "Then the young ladies came with their husbands. Miss Susan he took to at once--a very sp;.rited and handsome voun lady, but it's my opinion he couldn t abide her husband. Young ladies make funny choices nowadays, s .

"And the other couple ?"

"I couldn't say much about that. A very pleasant and good-looking young pa, ir. I think the master enjoyed having them here--but I don t think ." The old man hesitated. "Yes, Lanscombe ?"

"Well, the master had never had much truck with the stage. He said to me one day, 'I can't understand why anyone gets stage-struck. It's a foolish kind of life. Seems to deprive people of what little sense they have. I don't know what it does to your moral sense. You certainly lose

your sense of proportion.' Of course he wasn't referring directly"

"No, no, I quite understand. Now after these visits, Mr. Abernethie himself went away--first to his brother, and afterwards to his sister Mrs. Lansquenet."

?o

"That I did not know, sir. I mean he mentioned to me that he was going to Mr. Timothy and afterwards to Something St. Mary."

"That is right. Can you remember anything he said on his return in regard to those visits ?"

Lanscombe reflected.

"I really don't know--nothing direct. He was glad to be back. Travelling and staying in strange houses tired him very muchmthat I do remember his saying."

"Nothing else ? Nothing about either of them ?"

Lanscombe frowned.

"The master used to--well, to murmur, if you get my meaning--speaking to me and yet more to himself--hardly noticing I was there--because he knew me so well." "Knew you and trusted you, yes."

"But my recollection is very vague as to what he said--something about he couldn't think what he'd done with his money--that was Mr. Timothy, I take it. And then he said something about ' Women can be fools in ninety-nine different

ways but be pretty shrewd in the hundredth. Oh yes, and he said, ' You can only say what you really think to someone of your own generation. They don't think you're fancying things as the younger ones do.' And later he said but I don't know in what connectionm 'It's not very nice to have to set traps for people, but I don't see what else I can do.' But I think it possible, sir, that he may have been thinking of the second gardener--a question of the peaches being taken.

But Mr. Entwhistle did not think that it was the second gardener who had been in Richard Abernethie's mind. After a few more questions he let Lanscombe go and reflected on what he had learned. Nothing, really--nothing, that is, that he had not deduced before. Yet there were suggestive points. It was not his sister-in-law, Maude, but his sister Cora of whom he had been thinking when he made the remark about women who were fools and yet shrewd. And it was to her he had confided his "fancies." And he had spoken of setting a trap. For whom ?

Mr. Entwhistle had meditated a good deal over how much he should tell Helen. In the end he decided to take her wholly into his confidence.

First he thanked her for sorting out Richard's things and

for making various household arrangements. The house had been advertised for sale and there were one or two prospective buyers who would be shortly coming to look over it.

"Private buyers ?"

"I'm afraid not. The ¥1W.C.A. are considering it, and there is a young people's club, and the Trustees of the Jefferson Trust are looking for a suitable place to house their Collection."

"It seems sad that the house will not be lived in, but of course it is not a practicable proposition nowadays."

"I am going to ask you if it would be possible for you to remain here until the house is sold. Or would it be a great inconvenience ?"

"No--actually it would suit me very well. I don't want to go to Cyprus until May, and I much prefer being here than to being in London as I had planned. I love this house, you know; Leo loved it, and we were always happy when we were here together."

"There is another reason why I should be grateful if you would stay on. There is a friend of mine, a man called Hercule Poirot--"

Helen said sharply:

"Hercule Poirot?

Then you

think- "

"You know of him ?"

"Yes. Some friends of mine but I imagined that he was dead long ago."

"He is very much alive. Not y,o, ung, of course."

"No, he could hardly be young.

She spoke mechanically. Her face was white and strained.

She said with an effort:

"You think--that Cora was right ? That Richard was-- murdered ?"

Mr. Entwhistle unburdened himself. It was a pleasure to unburden himself to Helen with her clear calm mind.

When he had finished she said:

"One ought to feel it's fantastic--but one doesn't. Mande and I, that night ater the funeral--it was in both our minds, I'm sure. Saying to ourselves what a silly woman Cora was--and yet being uneasy. And then--Cora was killed--and



I told myself it was'just coincidenceand of course it may be--but oh I if one can only be sure. It's all so difficult."

"Yes, it's difficult. But Poirot is a man of great originality and he has something really approaching genius. He understands perfectly what we need--assurance that the whole thing is a mare's nest."

"And suppose it isn't ?"

"What makes you say that ?" asked Mr. Entwhistle

sharply.

"I don't know. I've been uneasy... Not just about what Cora said that day--something else. Something that I felt at the time to be wrong."

"Wrong ? In what way ?"

"That's just it. I don't know."

"You mean it was something about one of the people in the room ?"

"Yes--yes--something of that kind. But I don't know who or what... Oh that sounds absurd.--"

"Not at all. It is interesting--very interesting. You are not a fool, Helen. If you noticed something, that something has significance."

"Yes, but I can't remember what it was. The more I think "

"Don't think. That is the wrong way to bring anything back. Let it go. Sooner or later it will flash into your mind. And when it does-let me know--at once."

## CHAPTER IX

Miss G.cImST pulled her black felt hat down firmly on her head and tucked in a wisp of grey hair. The inquest was set for twelve o'clock and it was not quite twenty-past eleven. Her grey coat and skirt looked quite nice, she thought, and she had bought herself a black blouse. She wished she could have been all in black, but that would have been far beyond

her means. She looked round the small neat bedroom and at the walls hung with representations of Brixham harbour, Cockington Forge, Anstey's Cove, Kyance Cove, Polflexan harbour, Babbacombe Bay, etc., all signed in a dashing way, Cora Lansquenet. Her eyes rested with particular fondness on Polflexan harbour. On the chest of drawers a faded

otograph carefully framed represented the Willow Teashop.

iss Gilchrist looked at it lovingly and sighed.



She was disturbed from her reverie by the sound of the door bell below.

"Dear me," murmured Miss Gilchrist," I wonder who-"

She went out of her room and down the rather rickety stairs. The bell sounded again and there was a sharp knock.

For some reason Miss Gilchrist felt nervous. For a moment or two her steps slowed up, then she went rather unwillingly to the door, adjuring herself not to be so silly.

A young woman dressed smartly in black and carrying a small suitcase was standing on the step. She noticed the alarmed look on Miss Gilchrist's face and said quickly:

"Miss Gilchrist ? I am Mrs. Lansquenet's niece---Susan Banks."

"Oh dea, yes, of course. I didn't know. Do come in, Mrs. Banks. Mind the hall-stand--it sticks out a little. In here, yes. I didn't know you were coming down for the inquest. I'd have had something readymsome coffee or something."

Susan Banks said briskly:

"I don't want anything. I'm so sorry if I startled you."

"Well, you know you lid, in a way. It's very silly of me. I'm not usually nervous. In fact I told the lawyer that I asn't nervous, and that I wouldn't be nervous staying on here alone, and really I'm not nervous. Only--perhaps it's just the inquest and and thinking of things, but I have been jumpy all this morning. Just about half an hour ago the bell rang and I could hardly bring myself to open the door--which was really very stupid and so unlikely that a murderer would come back--and why should he ?--and actually it was only a nun, collecting for an orphanage--and I was so relieved I gave her two shillings although I'm of a Roman Catholic and indeed have no sympathy with the Roman Church and all these monks and nuns though I believe the Little Sisters of the Poor do r, eally do good work. But do please sit down, Mrs.--Mrs ..

"Banks."

"Yes, of course, Banks. Did you come down by train ?"

"No, I drove down. The lane seemed so narrow I ran the car on a little way and found a sort of old quarry I backed

it into."

"This lane is very narrow, but there's hardly ever any traffic along here. It's rather a lonely road."

Miss Gilchrist gave a little shiver as she said those last words.

Susan Banks was looking round the room.



"Poor old Aunt Cora," she said. "She left what she had to me, you know."

"Yes, I know. Mr. Entwhistle told me. I expect you'll be glad of the furniture. You're newly married, I,understand, and furnishing is such an expense nowadays· Mrs. Lansquenet had some very nice things."

Susan did not agree. Cora had had no taste for the antique. The contents varied between "modernistic" pieces and the "arty" type.

"I shan't want any of the furniture," she said. "I've got my own, you know. I shall put it up for auction. Unless --is there any of it you would like ? I'd be very glad..."

She stopped, a little embarrassed. But Miss Gilchrist was not at all embarrassed. She beamed.

"Now really, that's vry kind of you, Mrs. Banks--yes, very kind indeed. I really do appreciate it. But actually,

you know, I have my own things. I put them in store in case --some day--I should need them. There axe some pictures my father left too. I had a small tea-shop at one time, you know--but then the war came---it was all very unfortunate. But I didn't sell up everything, because I did hope to have my own little home ag, am one day, so I put the best things in store with my father s pictures and some relics of our o1 home. But I would like very much, if you really wonldn t mind, to have that little painted tea table of dear Mrs. Lansq,uenet's. Such a pretty thing and we always had tea on it.'

Susan, looking with a slight shudder at a small green table painted with large purple clematis, said quickly that she would be delighted for Miss Gilchrist to have it.

, "Thank you wry much, Mrs. Banks. I feel a little greedy. Ive got all her beautiful pictures, you know, and a lovely amethyst brooch, but I feelthat perhaps I ought to give that back to you."

"No, no, indeed."

"You'll want to go through her things ? After the inquest, perhaps ?"

"I thought I'd stay here a couple of days, go through things, and clear everything up."

Sleep here, you mean.

"Yes. Is there any difficulty ?"

"Oh no, Mrs. Banks, of course not. I'll put fresh sheets

on,,my bed, and I can class down here on the couch quite wen."

· But there's Aunt Cora's room, isn't there ? I can sleep m that? '



"You--you wouldn't mind ?"

"You mean because she was murdered there ? Oh no, I

wouldn't mind. I'm very tou,g,h,, Miss Gilchrist. It's been

--I mean--it's all right again ?

Miss Gilchrist understood the question.

"Oh yes, Mrs. Banks. All the blankets sent away to the

cleaners and Mrs. Panter and I scrubbed the whole room out

thoroughly. And there are plenty of spare blankets. But

come up and see for yourself."

She led the way upstairs and Susan followed her.

The room where Cora Lansquenet had died was clean and fresh and curiously devoid of any sinister atmosphere. Like the sitting-room it contained a mixture of modern utility and elaborately painted furniture. It represented Cora's cheerful tasteless personality. Over the mantelpiece an oil painting showed a buxom young woman about to enter her bath.

Susan gave a slight shudder as she looked at it and Miss Gilchrist said:

"That was painted by Mrs. Lansquenet's husband. There are a lot of more of his pictures in the dining-room downstairs."

"How terrible."

"Well, I don't care very much for that style of painting myself--but Mrs. Lansquenet was very proud of her husband

as an artist and thought that his work was sadly unappre

ciated."

"Where are Aunt Cora's own pictures ?"

"In my room. Would you like to see them ?"

Miss Gilchrist displayed her treasures proudly.

Susan remarked that Aunt Cora seemed to have been fond

of sea coast resorts.

"Oh yes. You see, she lived for many years with Mr.
Lansquenet at a small fishing village in Brittany.
Fishing

boats,, are. alwa,s so picturesque, are they not ?."

.

Obwously, Susan murmured. A whole series of pmture

postcards could, she thought, have been made from Cora

Lansquenet's paintings which were faithful to detail and very

highly coloured. They gave rise to the suspicion that they might actually have been painted from picture postcards. But when she hazarded this opinion Miss Gilchrist was indignant. Mrs. Lansquenet always painted from Nature l Indeed, once she had had a touch of the sun from reluctance to leave a subject when the light was just right.

"Mrs. Lansquenet was a real artist," said Miss Gilclarist reproachfully.

She glanced at her watch and Susan said quickly:



"Yes, we ought to start for the inquest. Is it far ? Shall I get the car ?"

It was only five minutes' walk, Miss Gilchrist assured her.

$o they set out to§ether on foot. Mr. Entwhistle, who had come down by train, met them and shepherded them into the Village Hall.

There seemed to be a large number of strangers present.

The inquest was not sensational. There was evidence of identification of the deceased. Medical evidence as to the nature of the wounds that had killed her. There were no signs of a struggle. Deceased was probably under a narcotic at the time she was attacked and would have been taken quite unawares. Death was unlikely to have occurred later than four-thirty. Between two and four-thirty was the nearest approximation. Miss Gilchrist testified to finding the body.

A police constable and Inspector Morton gave their evidence.

The Coroner summed up briefly. The jury made no bones about the verdict, "Murder by some person or persons unknown."

It was over. They came out again into the sunlight. Half a dozen cameras clicked. Mr. Entwhistle shepherded Susan and Miss Gilchrist into the King's Arms, where he had taken the precaution to arrange for lunch to be served in a private room behind the bar.

"Not a very good lunch, I am afraid," he said apologetically.

But the lunch was not at all bad. Miss Gilchrist sniffed a little and murmured that "it was all so dreadful," but cheered up and tackled the Irish stew with appetite after Mr. Entwhistle had insisted on her drinking a glass of sherry.

He said to Susan:

"I'd no idea you were coming down to-day, Susan. We could have come together."

"I know I said I wouldn't. But it seemed rather mean for none of the family to be there. I rang up George but he said he was very busy and couldn't possibly make it, and Rosamund had an audition and Uncle Timothy, of course, is a crock. So it had to be me."

"Your husband didn't come with you ?"

"Greg had to settle up with his tiresome shop."

Seeing a startled look in Miss Gilchrist's eye, Susan said: "My husband works in a chemist's shop."

A husband in retail trade did not quite square with Miss Gilchrist's impression of Susan's smartness, but she said valiantly: "Oh yes, just like Keats."

"Greg's no poet," said Susan.

She added:

"We've got great plans for the futurea double-barrelled establishment--Cosmetics and Beauty parlour and alaboratory for special preparations"

,o That will be much racer, sad Mxss Gilchrist approwngly.

Something like Elizabeth Arden who is really a Countess, so I have been told--or is that Helena Rubinstein ? In any case," she added kindly, "a pharmacist's is not in the least like an ordinary shop--a draper, for instance, or a grocer."

"You kept a tea-shop, you said, didn't you ?"

"Yes, indeed," Miss Gilchrist's face lit up. That the Willow Tree had ever been "trade" in the sense that a shop

was trade, would never have occurred to her. To keep a teashop

was in her mind the essence of gentility. She started

telling Susan about the Willow Tree.

Mr. Entwhistle, who had heard about it before, let his mind

drift to other matters. When Susan had spoken to him twice

without his answering he hurriedly apologised.

"Forgive me, my dear, I was thinking, as a matter of fact,

about your Uncle Timothy. I am a little worried."

"About Uncle Timothy ? I shouldn't be. I don't believe

really there's anything the matter with him. He's just a

hypochondriac."

"Yes--yes, you may be right. I confess it was not his

heth that was worrying me. It's Mrs. Timothy. A,pparently

she s fallen downstairs and twisted her ankle. She s laid up

and your uncle is in a terrible state."

"Because he'll have to look after her instead of the other

way about ? Do him a lot of good," said Susan.

"Yes--yes, I dare say. But will your poor aunt get any .looking after ? That is really the question. With no servants

m the house."

"Life is really hell for elderly peolle," said Susan "They

live in a kind of Georgian Manor house, don t they ?"

Mr. Entwhistle nodded.

They came rather warily out of the King's Arms, but the

Press seemed to have dispersed.

A couple of reporters were lying in wait for Susan by the

cottage door. Shepherded by Mr. Entwhistle she said a few necessary and non-committal words. Then she and Miss Gilchrist went into the cottage and Mr. Entwhistle returned to the King's Arms where he had booked a room. The funeral was to be on the following day.

. My. car s still m the quarry, saad Susan. I d forgotten about t. I'll drive it along to the village later."

Miss Gilchrist said anxiously:



"Not too late. You won't go out after dark, will you ? '

Susan looked at her and laughed.

"You don't think there's a murderer still hanging about, do you ?"

"No--no, I suppose not." Miss Gilchrist looked embarrassed.

"But it's exactly what she does think," thought Susan.

"How amazing I"

Miss Gilchrist had vanished towards the kitchen.

"I'm sure you'd like tea early. In about half an hour, do you think, Mrs. Banks ?"

Susan thought that tea at half-past three was overdoing it, but she was charitable enough to realise that "a nice cup of tea" was Miss Gilchrist's idea of restoration for the nerves and she had her own reasons for wishing to please Miss Gilchrist,

so she said:

"Whenever yon like, Miss Gilchrist."

A happy clatter of kitchen implements began and Susan went into the sitting-room. She had only been there a few minutes when the bell sounded and was succeeded by a very precise little rat-tat-tat.

Susan came out into the hall and Miss Gilchrist appeared at the kitchen door wearing an apron and wiping floury hands on it.

"Oh dear, who do you think that can be ?"

"More reporters, I expect," said Susan.

"Oh dear, how annoying for you, Mrs. Banks."

"Oh well, never mind, I'll attend to it."

"I was just going to make a few scones for tea."

Susan went towards the front door and Miss Gilchrist hovered uncertainly. Susan wondered whether she thought a man with a hatchet was waiting outside.

The visitor, however proved to be an elderly gentleman who raised his hat when Susan opened the door and said, beaming at her in avuncular style.

"Mrs. Banks, I think ?" "Yes."

"My name is Guthrie--Alexander Guthrie. I was a friend --a very old friend, of Mrs. Lansquenet's. You, I think, axe her niece, formerly Miss Susan Abernethie ?"

"That's quite right."

"Then since we know who we are, I may come in ?" "Of course."

Mr. Guthrie wiped his feet carefully on the mat, stepped

inside, divested himself of his overcoat, laid it down with his

79

hat on a small oak chest anc1 flod Susan into the sitting.

room·

"This is a melancholy cOCcsi0," said Mr. Guthrie, to

.wh.o.m melancholy did not ,sm t0come naturally, his own

inclination being to beam. ' es, avery melancholy occasion. I was in this part of the worlld adl felt the least I could do

as to attend the inquest--a?nd of,ourse the funeral. Poor

ora--poor foolish Cora. I na. we own her, my dear Mrs.

B. anks, since the early days ocr. her, arriae. A high-spirited

glr!--and she took art very seriOUSly-took Pierre Lansquenet

s.e. no,u, sly, too--as an artist, I : ean. fill things considered he

dldn t make her too bad a hu and. He strayed, if you know

what I mean, yes, he strayeclbutortunately Cora took it

as part of the artistic tempeamem. He was an artist and

therefore immor! In fact I'm not sure she didn't go

further: he was immoral and therefore he must be an artist I

No kind of sense in artistic cnatte, poor Cora--though in

other ways, mind you, Cora ad a lot of sense--yes, a surprising

lot of sense."

"That's what everybody sems to say," said Susan. "X

didn't really know her."

"No, no, cut herself off fror her family because they didn't

appreciate her precious Pierre. e was never a pretty ffirl

but she had something. She w's goo company 1 You never

knew what she'd say next and[ you ever knew if her naivetd was-genuine or whether she xsrs, doiag it deliberatel.y,,. She

mad.e us all laugh a good deal. ne ,eternal child--that s what

we always felt about her. Anciny the last time I saw her

(I have seen her from time to titm ncc Pierre died) she struck

me as still behaving very muclx like a child"

Susan offered Mr. Guth' rie a cigarette, but he old gentleman

shook his head.

"No thank you, my dear. I doa't smoke. You must

wonder why I've come ? To t1 1 y.ou the truth I was feeling

rather conscience-stricken. I pfamSe Cora to come and see

her, some weeks ag,o. I usually.,ca d upon her once a year,

anct just lately she d taken up ,ne n0bby of buying pictures

at local sales, and wanted me o look at some of them. My

profe, ssion is that of art critic, you know. Of course most of

Cora s purchases were horrible daubs, but take it all in all,

it is.,n't such a bad speculation, l,ictures go for next to nothing

trese country sales and the -rames alone are worth more

· a,.you, pay for the picture, la.tur?lly any important sale

s attenced by dealers and one sn t likely to get hold of

masterpieces. But only the other dy, a small Cuyp was

knocked down for a few pounds at a farmhouse sale. The history of it was quit.e, int,ere?ting. It had been given to an old nurse by the mmuy sne rand served faithfully for many

l

ears--they had no idea of it:s value. Old nurse gave it to armer nephew who liked the horse in it but thought it was a dirty old thing I Yes, yes, t:hese things sometimes happen, and Cora was convinced that she had an eye for pictures. She hadn't, of course. Wantmd me to come and look at a Rembrandt she had picked the last year. A Rembrandt l Not even a respectable copy of! ne I But she had got hold of a quite nice Bartolozzi englravingamp spotted unfortunately. I sold it for her fo,r thirty pounds and of course that spurred her on. She wrote to me with great gusto about an Italian Primitive she had[ bought at some sale and I promised I'd come along and See it."

"That's it over there, I ex[oect," said Susan, gesturing to the wall behind him.

Mr. Guthrie got up, put on a pair of spectacles, and went over to study the picture.

"Poor dear Cora," he said a.t last.

"There are a lot more," said Susan.

Mr. Guthrie proceeded to a leisurely inspection of the art treasures acquired by the hoDeful l[rs. Lansquenet. Occasionally he said, "Tchk, Tchk," occasionally he sighed.

Finally he removed his spectacles.

"Dirt," he said, "is a won`derful thing, Mrs. Banks I It gives a patina of romance to the most horrible examples of the painter's art. I'm afraid that Bartolozzi was beginner's luck. Poor Cora. Still it gave her a,n interest in life. I am really thankful that I did not have to disillusion her."

"There are some pictures in, the dining-room," said Susan, "but I think they are all her husband's work."

Mr. Guthrie shuddered slightly and held up a protesting hand.

"Do not force me to look at those again. Life classes have much to answer for I I alwaya tried to spare Cora's feelings. A devoted wife--a very devoted wife. Well, dear Mrs. Banks, I must not take up more of yaur time."

"Oh, do stay and have some tea. I think it's nearly ready."

"That is very kind of you." Mr. Guthrie sat down again promptly.

"I'll just go and see."

In the kitchen, Miss Gilchrit was just lifting a last batch of scones from the oven. The tea-tray stood ready and the kettle was just gently rattling its lid.

"There's a Mr. Guthrie here, and I've asked him to stay for tea."

"Mr. Guthrie ? Oh, yes, he was a great friend of dear Mrs. Lansquenet's. He's the celebrated art critic. How fortunate; I've made a nice lot of scones and that's some home-made strawberry jam, and I just whipped up some little drop cakes. I'll just make the tea--I've warmed the pot. Oh, please, Mrs. Banks, don't carry that heavy tray. I can manage everything."

However, Susan took in the tray and Miss Gilchrist followed with teapot and kettle, greeted Mr. Guthrie, and they set to.

"Hot scones, that is a treat," said Mr. Guthrie, "and what delicious jam I Really, the stuff one buys nowadays."

Miss Gilchrist was flushed and delighted. The little cakes were excellent and so were the scones, and everyone did justice to them. The ghost of the Willow Tree hung over the party. Here, it was clear, Miss Gilchrist was in her element.

"Well, thank you, perhaps I will," said Mr. Guthrie as he accepted the last cake, pressed upon him by Miss Gilchrist. "I do feel rather guilty, though---enjoying my tea here, where poor Cora was so brutally murdered."

Miss Gilchrist displayed an unexpected Victoia reaction to this.

"Oh, but Mrs. Lansquenet would have wished you to take a good tea. You've got to keep your strength up."

"Yes, yes, perhaps you are right. The fact is, you know, that one cannot really bring oneself to believe that someone you knew--actually knew--can have been murdered I" "I agree," said Susan. "It just seems--fantastic." "And certainly not by some casual tramp who broke in and attacked her. I can imagine, 3,}ou know, reasons why Cora might have been murdered

Susan said quickly, "Can you ? What reasons ?" "Well, she wasn't discreet," said Mr. Guthrie. "Cora was never discreet. And she enjoyed--how shaw I put it--showing how sharp she could be ? Like a child who s got hold of somebody's secret. If Cora got hold of a secret she'd want to talk about it. Even if she promised not to, she'd still do it. She wouldn't be able to help herself."

Susan did not speak. Miss Gilchrist did not either. She looked worried. /lr. Guthrie went on:

"Yes, a little dose of arsenic in a cup of tea--that would not have surprised me, or a box of chocolates by post. But sordid robbery and assault--that seems highly incongruous. I may be wrong but I should have thought she had very little to take that would be worth a burglar's while. She didn't keep much money in the house, did she ?"

Miss Gilchrist said, "Very little."

Mr. Guthrie sighed and rose to his feet.

"Ah! well, there's a lot of lawlessness about since the war. Times have changed."

Thanking them for the tea he took a polite farewell of the two women. Miss Gilchrist saw him out and helped him on with his overcoat. From the window of the sitting-room, Susan watched him trot briskly down the front path to the gate.

Miss Gilchrist came back into the room with a small parcel in her hand.

"The postman must have been while we were at the inquest. He pushed it through the letter-box and it had fallen in the corner behind the door. Now I wonder--why, of course, it must be wedding cake."

Happily Miss Gilchrist ripped off the paper. Inside was a small white box tied with silver ribbon.

"It is I" She pulled off the ribbon, inside was a modest wedge of rich cake with almond paste and white icing. "How nice I Now who "She consulted the card attached. ".John and Mary. Now who can that be? How silly to put no

Susan, rousing herself from contemplation, said vaguely:

"It's quite difficult sometimes with people just using Christian names. I got a postcard the other day signed Joan. I counted up I knew eight Joans--and with telephoning so much, one often doesn't know their handwriting."

Miss Gilchrist was happily going over the possible Johns or Marys of her acquaintance.

"It might be Dorothy's daughter--her name was Mary, but I hadn't heard of an engagement, still less of a marriage.

Then there's little John Banfield--I suppose he's grown up and old enough to be married--or the Erdield girl--no, her name was Margaret. No address or anything. Oh well, I dare say it will come to me..."

She picked up the tray and went out to the kitchen.

Susan roused herself and said:

"Well--I suppose I'd better go and put the car somewhere."



## CHAPTER X

SusASTmEVrI) the car from the quarry where she had left it and drove it into the village. There was a petrol pump but no garage and she was advised to take it to the King's Arms. They had room for it there and she left it by a big Daintier which was preparing to go out. It was chauffeur driven and inside it, very much muffled up, was an elderly foreign gentleman with a large moustache.

The boy to whom Susan was talking about the car was stming at her with such rapt attention the he did not seem to be taking in half of what she said.

Finall,y he said in an aw, e-stricke, n voice:

"You re her niece, aren t you ? ,, Vrhat ? ,,

"You're the victim's niece," the boy repeated with relish.

i Oh--yes--yes, I am."

Ar 1 Wondered where ¥d seen you before."

"Ghoul," thought Susan as she retraced her steps to the cottage.

Miss Gilchrist greeted her with:

"Oh, you're safely back," in tones of relief which further annoyed her. Miss Gilchrist added anxiously:

"You can eat spaghetti, can't you ? I thought for tonight----"

"Oh yes, anything. I don't want much."

"I really flatter myself that I can make a very tasty spaghetti aw gratin."

The boast was not an idle one. Miss Gilchrist, Susan reflected, was really an excellent cook. Susan offered to help wash up but Miss Gilchrist, though clearly gratified by the offer, assured Susan that there was very little to do.

She came in a little while later with coffee. The coffee was less excellent, being decidedly weak. Miss Gilchrist offered Susan a piece of the wedding cake which Susan refused.

"It's really very good cake," Miss Gilchrist insisted, tasting it. She had settled to her own satisfaction that it must have been sent by someone whom she alluded to as "dear Ellen's daughter who I know was engaged to be married but I can't remember her name."

Susan let Miss Gilchrist chirrup away into silence before starting her own subject of conversation. This moment, after

supper, sitting before the fire, was a companionable one.



She said at last:

"My Uncle Richard came down here before he died, didn't he?"

"Yes, he did."

"When was that exactly ?"

"Let me see--it must have been one, two--nearly three weeks before his death was announced."

"Did he seem--ill ?"

"Well, no, I wouldn't say he seemed exactly ill. lie had a very hearty vigorous manner. Mrs. Lansquenet was very surprised to see him. She said, ' Well, really, Richard, after all these years l' And he said, 'I came to see for myself exactly how things are with you.' And Mrs. Lansquenet said, ' I'm all right.' I think, you know, she was a teeny bit

offended by his turning up so casually--after the long break.

Anyway Mr. Abernethie said, ' No use keeping up old griev-ances.

You and I and Timothy are the only ones left--and

nobody can talk to Timothy except about his own health.'

And he sad, Perre seems to have. made yo happy, so t

seems I was in the wrong. There, will that content you ? '

Very nicely he said it. A handsome man, though elderly, of

course."

"How long was he here ?"

"He stayed for lunch. Beef olives, I made. Fortunately

it was the day the butcher called."

Miss Gilchrist's memory seemed to be alraost wholly

culinary.

"They seemed to be getting on well together ?"

"Oh, yes."

Susa paused and then said:

"Was Aunt Cora surprised when--he died ?"

"Oh yes, it was quite sudden, wasn't it ?"

"Yes, it was sudden... I meant--she was su,.rprised. He hadn't given her any indication how ill he was.'

"Oh--I see what you mean." Miss Gilchrist paused a moment. "No, no, I think perhaps you are right. She did

say that he had got very old--I think she said senile..."

"But you didn't think he was senile ?"

"Well, not to look at. But I didn't talk to him much, naturally I left them alone together."

Susan looked at Miss Gilchrist speculatively. Was Miss Gilchrist the kind of woman who listened at doors ? She was honest, Susan felt sure, she wouldn't ever pilfer, or cheat over the housekeeping, or open letters. But inquisitiveness can drape itself in a mantle of rectitude. Miss Gilhrist might



have found it necessary to garden near an open window, or to dust the hall... That would be within the permitted lengths. And then, of course, she could not have helped

hearing someth, ing...

"You didn t hear 'any of their conversation ? °' Susan asked.

Too abrupt. Miss Gfichrist flushed angrily.

"No, indeed, Mrs. Banks. It has never been my custom to

listen at doors I"

That means she does, thought Susan, otherwise she'd just

say "No."

Aloud she said: "I'm so sorry, Miss Gilchrist. I didn't mean it that way. But sometimes, in these small flimsily

built cottages, one simply can't help hearing nearly everything

that goes on, and now that they are both dead, it's really

rather important to the fam,y to know just what was said at

that meeting between them.'

The cottage was anything but flimsily built--it dated from

a sturdier era of building, but Miss Gilchrist accepted the bait,

and rose to the suggestion held. out.

"Of course what you say is quite true, Mrs. Banks---this is a very small place and I do appreciate that yu would

want to know what passed between them, but really I m afraid

I can't help v,e? much. I think they were talking about

Mr. Abernethie s health--and certain--well, fandes he had.

He didn't look it, but he must have been a sick man and as is so often the case, he put his ill-health down to

s/e. A common symptom, I believe. My aunt"

Miss Gilchrist described her aunt.

Susan, like Mr. Entwhistle, side-tracked the aunt.

"Yes," she said. "That is just what we thought. My

uncle's servants were all very attached to him and naturally

they are upset by his thinking" She paused.

"Oh, of course I Servants are vy touchy, about anything

of that kind. I remember that my aunt-

Again Susan interrupted.

"It was the servants he suspected, I suppose ? Of poisoning

him, I mean ?"

"I don't know... I--really"

Susan noted her confusion.

"It wasn't the servants. Was it one particular person ? '°

"I don't know, Mrs. Banks. Really I don't know"

But her eye avoided Susan's. Susan thought to herself that

Miss Gilchrist knew more than she was willing to admit.

It was possible that Miss Gilchrist knew a good deal . . .



Deciding not to press the point for the moment, Susan said:

"What are your own plans for the future, Miss Gilchrist ?"

"Well, really, I was going to speak to you about that,

Mrs. Banks. I told Mr. Entwhistle I would be willing to stay

on until everything here was cleared up."

"I know. I'm very grateful."

"And I wanted to ask you how long that was likely to be, because, of course, I must start looking about for another post."

Susan considered.

"There's really not very much to be done .h. ere: In a couple of days I can get things sorted and notiiy the auco tioneer."

"You have decided to sell up everything, then ?"

"Yes. I don't suppose there will be any difficulty in letting the cottage ?"

"Oh, no--people will queue up for it, I'm sure. There are so,!ew co,ttages to rent. One nearly ,ways has to buy."

So it s all very simple, you see. Susan hesitated a moment before sa'ying, "I wanted to tell you--that I hope you'll accept three months' salary."

"That's very generous of you, I'm sure, Mrs. Banks. I do appreciate it. And you would be prepared to--I mean I could ask youmif necessarymto--to recommend me ? To

say that I had been with a relation of yours and that I had

--proved satisfact,o, ry ?"

"Oh, of course.

"I don't know whether I ought to ask it." Miss Gilchrist's hands began to shake and she tried fo steady her voice. "But would it be possible not to--to mention the circumstances--

or even the nam ?"

Susan stared.

"I don't understand."

"That's because you, haven't thought, Mrs. Ba. nks. It's murder. A murder that s been in the papers and that every-body has read about. Don't you see ? People might think. ' Two women living together, and one of them is killed--and prhaps the companion did it.' Don't you see, Mrs. Banks ? I'm sure that if I was looking for someone, I'dwell, I'd think twice before engaging myself--if you understand what I mean. Because one never knows I It's been worrying me dreadfully, Mrs. Banks; I've been lying awake at night thinking that perhaps I'll never get another jobnot of this

kind. And what else is there that I can do ?"

The question came out with unconscious pathos. Susan



felt suddenly stricken. She ealised the desperation of this pleasant-spoken commonplace woman who was dependent for existence on the fears and whims of emiloyers. And there was a lot of truth in what Miss Gilchrist had said. You wouldn't, if you could help it, engage a woman to share domestic intimacy who had figured, however innocently, in a murder case.

Susan said: "But if they find the man who did it" "Oh thn, of course, it will be quite all right. But will they find him ? I don't think, myself, the police have the /st da. And if he's of caught--well, that leaves me as--as not quite the most likely person, but as a person who could have done it."

Susan nodded thoughtfully. It was true that Miss Gfichrist did not benefit from Cora Lansquenet's death but who was to know that ? And besides, there were so many tales--ugly tales-of animOSity arising between women who lived to-

ether--strange pathological motives for sudden violence. omeone who had not known them might imagine that Cora Lansquenet and Miss Gilchrist had lived on those terms ....

Susan spoke with her usual decision.

"Don't worry, Miss Gilchrist," she said, speaking briskly and cheerfully. "I'm sure I can find you a post amongst my fri,e,ns. There,won't be the least difficulty."

' I m afraid, said Miss Gfichrist, regaining some of her customary manner, "that I couldn't undertake any really, rough work. Just a little plain cooking and housework----The telephone rang and Miss Gilchrist jumped.

"Dear me, I wonder who that can be."

"I expect it's my husband," said Susan, jumping up. "He said he'd ring me tonight."

She went to the telephone.

"Yes ?--yes, this is Mrs. Banks speaking personally..."

There was a pause and then her voice changed. It became soft and warm. "Hallo, darling--yes, it's me... Oh, quite well ... Murder by someone unknown.., the usual thing... Only Mr. Entwhistle... Vrhat ? . . . it's difficult to say, but I think so... Yes, just as we thought... Absolutely according to plan... I shall sell the stuff. There's nothing want... Not for a day or two... Absolutely frightful... Don't fuss. I know what I'm doing... Greg, you didn't... You were careful to... No, it's nothing. Nothing at all. Good night, darling."

She rang off. The nearness of Miss Gilchrist had hampered her a little. Miss Gfichrist could probably hear from the

kitchen, where she had tactfully retired, exactly what went on. There were things she had wanted to ask Greg, but she hadn't liked to.

She stood .by the telephone, frowning abstractedly. Then suddenly an idea came to her.

"Of course," she murmured. "Just the thing."

Lifting the receiver she asked for Trunk Enquiry.

Some quarter of an hour later a weary voice from the exchange was saying:

"I'm afraid there's no reply."

"Please go on ringing them."

Susan spoke autocratically. She lstened to the far off buzzing of a telephone bell. Then, suddenly it was interrupted

and a man's voice, peevish and slightly indignant, said:

"Yes, yes, what is it ?"

"Uncle Timothy ?"

"What's that ? I can't hear you."

"Uncle Timothy ? I'm Susan Banks."

"Susan who ?"

"Banks. Formerly Abernethie. Your niece Susan."

"Oh, you're Susan, are you ? What's the matter ? What

are you ringing up for at this time of night ?"

"It's quite early still."

"It isn't. I was in bed."

"You must go to bed very early. How's Aunt Maude ?"

"Is that all you rang ,u.p to ask ? Your aunt's in a go,o? deal of pain and she can t do a thing. Not a thing. She s helpless. We're in a nice mess, I can tell you. That fool of a doctor says he can't even get a nurse. He wanted to cart Maude off to hospital. I stood out against that. He's trying to get hold of someone for us. I can't do anything--I daren't even try. There's a fool from the village staying in the house to-night but she's murmuring about getting back to her husband. Don't know w/t we're going to do."

"That's what I rang up about. Would you like Miss

Gilchrist ?"

"Who's she ? Never heard of her."

"Aunt Cora's companion. She's very nice and capable."

"Can she cook ?"

"Yes, she cooks very well, and she could look after Aunt Maude."

"That's all very well, but when could she come ? Here I am, all on my own, with only these idiots of village women

I

opping in and out at odd hours, and it's not good for me. y eart s playing me up.



"I'll arrange for her to get off to you as soon as possible. The day after to-morrow, perhaps ?"

"Well, thanks very much," said the voice rather grudgingly. "You're a good girl, Susan--er--thank you."

Susan rang off and went into the kitchen.

"Would you be willing to go up to Yorkshire and look after my aunt ? She fell and broke her ankle and my uncle is quite useless. He's a bit of a pest but Aunt Maude is a very good sort. They have help in from the village, but you could cook and look after Aunt Maude."

Miss Gilchrist dropped the coffee pot in her agitation. "Oh, thank you, thank you--that really is kind. I think I can say of myself that I am really good in the sickroom, and I'm sure I can manage your uncle and cook him nice little meals. It's really very kind of you, Mrs. Banks, and I do appreciate it."

## CHAPTER XI

SJsAN rA¥ in bed and waited for sleep to come. It had been a long day and she was tired. She had been quite sure that she would go to sleep at once. She never had any ditticulty in going to sleep. And yet here she lay, hour after hour, wide awake, her mind racing.

She had said she did not, mind sleeping in this room, in this bed. This bed where Cora Abernethie----

No, no, she must put all that out of her mind. She had always prided herself' on having no nerves. Why think of that afternoon less than a week ago ? Think ahead the future. Her future and Greg's. Those premises in Cardigan Street--just what they wanted. The business on the ground

floor and a charming flat upstairs. The room out at the back

a laboratory for Greg. For purposes of income tax it would

be an excellent set-up. Greg would get calm and well again.

There would be no more of those alarming brainstorms.

The times when he looked at her without seeming to know

who she was. Once or twice she'd been quite frightened...

And old Mr. Cole--he'd hinted--threatened: "If this

happens again..." And it might have happened again it would have happened again. If Uncle Richard hadn't died

just when he did...

Uncle Richard--but really why look at it like that ? He'd

nothing to live for. Old and tired and ill. His son dead.



It was a mercy really. To die i his sleep quietly like that.

Quietly... in his sleep If

only she could sleep. It

was

so stupid lying awake hour after hour.., hearing the

furniture

creak, and the rustling of trees and bushes outside

the

window and the occasional queer melancholy hoot--an

owl,

she supposed. How sinister the country was, somehow. So different from the big noisy indifferent town. One felt so safe there--surrounded by people--never alone. Whereas here...

Houses where a murder had been committed were sometimes haunted. Perhaps this cottage would come to be known as the haunted cottage. Haunted by the spirit of Cora Lans quenet... Aunt Cora. Odd, really, how ever since she had arrived she had felt as though Aunt Cora were quite close to her.., within reach. All nerves and fancy. Cora Lansquenet was dead, to-morrow she would be buried. There was no one in the cottage except Susan herself and Miss Gilchrist. Then why did she feel that there was someone in this room, someone close

beside her...

She

had lain on this bed when the hatchet fell Lying

there

trustingly

asleep... Kowing nothing till the hatchet

fell... And now she wonldn t let Susan sleep ....

The furniture creaked again.., was that a stealthy step ?

Susan switched on the light. Nothing. Nerves, nothing but

nerves. Relax... close your eyes...

Surely that was a groan--a groan or a faint moan...

So,,meone in pain--someone dying...

I mustn't imagine things, I nstn't, I mustn't," Susan

whispered to herself.

Death was the end--there was no existence after death.

Under no circumstances could anyone come back. Or was she reliving a scene from the past--a dying woman groaning ....

There it was again.., stronger.., someone groaning in acute pain...

But--this was real. Once again Susan switched on the light, sat up in bed and listened. The groans were real groans and she was hearing them through the wall. They came from the room next door.

Susan jumped out of bed, flung on a dressing-gown and crossed to the door. She went out on to the landing, tapped for a moment on Miss Gilchrist's door and then went in. Miss Gilchrist's light was on. She was sitting up in bed.

She looked ghastly. Her face was distorted with pain.

Mss Gilchrist, what s the matter. Are you ill ?

"Yes. I don't know what--I--" she tried to get out of

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bed, was seized with a fit of vomiting and then collapsed back on the pillows.

She murmured: ,Please---ring up doctor. Must have eaten something ....

"I'll get you some bicarbonate. We can get the doctor in

the morning if you're not better."

Miss Gilchrist shook her head.

"No, get doctor now. I--I feel dreadful."

"Do you know his number ? Or shall I look in the book ?"

Miss Gilchrist gave her the number. She was interrupted by anoth, er fit of retching.

Susan s call was answered by a sleepy male voice.

"Who ? Gilchrist ? In Mead's Lane. Yes, I know. I'll b fight along."

He was as good as his word. Ten minutes later Susan heard his car draw up outside and she went to open the door to him.

She explained the case as she took him upstairs. "I think," she said, "she must have eaten something that dis-agreed with her. But she seems pretty bad."

The doctor had had the air of one keeping his temper in leash and who has had some experience of being called out unnecessarily on more than one occasion. But as soon as he examined the moaning woman his manner changed. He gave various curt orders to Susan and presently came down and telephoned. Then he joined Susan in the sitting-room.

"I've sent for an ambulance. Must get her into hospital."
"She's really bad then ?"

"Yes. I've given her a shot o! morp,h, ia to ease the pain. But it looks" He broke off. ' What s she eaten ?"

"We had macaroni au gratin for supper and a custard pud-ding. Coffee afterwards."

"You have the same things ?"

"Yes."

°' And you're all right ? No pain or discomfort ?"

"She's taken nothing else ? No tinned fish ? Or sausages?"

"No. We had lunch at the King's Arms--after the inquest."

"Yes, of course. You're Mrs. Lansquenet's niece ?"

"Yes."

"That was a nasty business. Hope they catch the man

who did it."

"Yes, indeed."

The ambulance came. Miss Gilchrist was taken away and the doctor went with her. He told Susan he would ring her

up in the morning. When he had left she went upstairs to bed,
This time she fell asleep as soon as her head touched the pillow°

2

The funeral was well attended. Most of the village had turned out. Susan and Mr. Entwhistle were the only mourners, but various wreaths had been sent by the other members of the family. Mr. Entwhistle asked where Miss Gilchrist was, and Susan explained the circumstances in a hurried whisper.

Mr. Entwhistle raised his eyebrows.

"Rather an odd occurrence ?"

"Oh, she's better this morning. They rang up from the hospital. People do get these bilious turns. Some make more fuss than others."

Mr. Entwhistle said no more. He was returning to London immediately after the funeral.

Susan went back to the cottage. She found some eggs and made herself an omelette. Then she went up to Cora's room and started to sort through the dead woman's things.

She was interrupted by the arrival of the doctor.

The doctor was looking worried. He replied to Susan's

inquiry by saying that Miss Gilchrist was much better.

"She'll be out and around in a couple of days," he said.

"But it was lucky I got called in so promptly. Otherwise---it

might have been ,a, near thing."

Susan stared. Was she really so bad ?"

"Mrs. Banks, will you tell me again exactly what Miss

Gilchrist had to eat and drink yesterday. Everything."

Susan reflected and gave a meticulous account. The doctor

shook his head in a dissatisfied manner.

"There must have been something she had and you

didn't ?"

"I don't think so... Cakes, scones, jam, tea--and then

supper. No, I can't remember anything."

The doctor rubbed his nose. He walked up and down the room.

"Was it definitely something she ate ? Definitely food

poisoning ?"

The doctor threw her a sharp glance. Then he seemed to

come to a decision.

"It was arsenic," he said.

"Arsenic ?" Susan stared. "You mean somebody gave

her arsenic ?"



"That's what it looks like."

"Could she have taken it herself ? Deliberately, I mean ?"

"Suicide ? She says not and she should know. Besides, if she wanted to commit suicide she wouldn't be likely to choose arsenic. There are sleeping pills in this house. She could have taken an overdose of them."

"Could the arsenic have got into something by accident ?"

"That's what I'm wondering. It seems very unlikely, but such things have been known. But if you and she ate the same things--"

Susan nodded. She said, "It all seems impossible--" then she gave a sudden gasp. "Why, of course, the wedding cake I"

"What's that ? Wedding cake ?"

Susan explained. The doctor listened with close attention.

"Odd. And you say she wasn't sure who sent,? ? Any of it left ? Or is the box it came in lying around ?

"I don't know. I'll look."

They searched together and finally found the white cardboard box with a few crumbs of cake still in it lying on the kitchen dresser. The doctor packed it away with some care.

"I'll take charge of this. Any idea where the wrapping paper it came in might be ?"

Here they were not successful and Susan said that it had probably gone into the Ideal boiler.

"You won't be leaving here just yet, lllrs. Banks ?"

His tone was genial, but it made Susan feel a little uncomfortable.

"No, I have to .g,,o through my aunt's things. I shall be

here for a few days

"Good. You understand the police will probably want to

ask some questions. You don't know of anyone who--well,

might have had it in for Miss Gilchrist ?"

Susan shook her head.

"I don't really know much about her. She was with my

aunt for some years--that's all I know."

"Quite, quite. Always seemed a pleasant unassuming

woman--quite ordinary. Not the kind, you'd say, to have

enemies or anything melodramatic of that kind. Wedding

cake through the post. Sounds like some jealous woman--but

who'd be jealous of Miss Gilchrist ? Doesn't seem to fit."

"No."

"Well, I must be on my way. I don't know what's hal>pening

to us in quiet little Lytchett St. Mary. First a brutal

murder and now attempted poisoning through the post. Odd,

the one following the other."

He went down the path to his car. The cottage felt stuffy

and Susan left th door standing open as she went slowly

upstairs to resume her task.

Cora Lansquenet had not been a tidy or methodical woman.

Her drawers held a miscellaneous assortment of things.

There were toilet accessories and letters and old handkerchiefs and paint brushes mixed up together in one drawer. There were a few old letters and bills thrust in amongst a bulging drawer of underclothes. In another drawer under some woollen jumpers was a cardboard box holding two false fringes. There was another drawer full of old photographs and sketching books. Susan lingered over a group taken evidently at some French place many years ago and which showed a younger, thinner Cora clinging to the arm of a tall lanky man with a straggling beard dressed in what seemed to be a velveteen coat and whom Susan took to be the late Pierre Lansquenet.

The photographs interested Susan, but she laid them aside, sorted all the papers she had found into a heap and began to go through them methodically. About a quarter way through she came on a letter. She read it through twice and was still staring at it when a voice speaking behind her caused her to give a cry of alarm.

"And what may you have got hold of there, Susan ?
Hallo, what's the matter ?"

Susan reddened with annoyance. Her cry of alarm had been quite involuntary and she felt ashamed and anxious to explain.

"George ? How you startled me I"

Her cousin smiled lazily. "So it seems."

"How did you get here ?"

"Well, the door downstairs was open, so I walked in. There seemed to be nobody about on the ground floor, so I came up here. If you mean how did I get to this part of the world, I started down this morning to come to the funeral." "I didn't see you there ?"

"The old bus played me up. The petrol feed seemed choked. I tinkered with it for some time and finally it seemed to clear itself. I was too late for the funeral by then, but I thought I might as well come on down. I knew you were here."

He paused and then went on:



"I rang you up, as a matter of fact--and Greg told me you'd come down to take possession, aa it were. I thought I might give you a hand."

Susan said, "Aren't you needed in the office ? Or can you take days off whenever you like ?"

"A funeral has always been a recognised excuse for absen teeism. And this funeral is indubitably genuine. Besides,

a murder always fascinates people. Anyway, I shan't be going much to the office in future--not now that I'm a man of means. I shall have better things to do."

He paused and grinned, "Same as Greg," he said.

Susan looked at George thoughtfully. She had never seen much of this cousin of hers and when they did meet she had always found him rather difficult to make out.

She asked," Why did y, ou really come down here, George ?"

I m not sure t wasn t to do a little detect,ye work. I ye been thinking a good deal about the last funeral we attended. Aunt Cora certainly threw a spanner into the works that day. I've wondered whether it was sheer irresponsibility and auntly joie de vivre that prompted her words, or whether she really

had something to go upon. What actually is in that letter

that you were reading so attentively when I came in ?"

Susan said slowly, "It's a letter that Uncle Richard wrote

to Cora after he'd been down here to see her."

I-Iow very black George's eyes were. She'd thought of them

as brown but they were black, and there was something

curiously impenetrable about black eyes. They concealed

the thoughts that lay behind them.

George drawled slowl,y,, "Anything interesting in it ?"

"No, not exactly...

"Can I see ?"

She hesitated for a moment, then put the letter into his

outstretched hand.

I-Ie read it, skimming over the contents in a Low monotone.

"Glad to have seen you again after all these years.., looking very well.., had a good journey home and arrived back not too tired "

His wice changed suddenly, sharpened:

"Please don't say anything to anyone about what I told you. It may be a mistake. Your loving brother, Richard."

lie looked up at Susan. "What does that mean ?"

"It might mean anything... It might be just about his health. Or it might be some gossip about a mutual friend."

"Oh yes, it might be a lot oi things. It isn't conclusive but it's suggestive .... What did he tell Cora ? Does anyone know what he told her ?"

"Miss Gilchrist might know," said Susan thoughtfully.

"I think she listened."

"Oh, yes, the Companion help. Where is she, by the way ?"

"In hospital, suffering from arsenic poisoning."

George stared.

"You don't mean it ?"

"I do. Someone sent her some poisoned wedding cake."

George sat down on one of the bedroom chairs and whistled.

"It looks," he said, "as though Uncle Richard was not mistaken."

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On the following morning Inspector Morton called at the cottage.

He was a quiet middle-aged man with a soft country burr in his voice. His manner was quiet and unhurried, but his eyes were shrewd.

"You realise what this is about, Mrs. Banks ?" he said. "Dr. Proctor has already told you about Miss Gilchrist. The few crumbs of wedding cake that he took from here have been analysed and show traces of arsenic."

"So somebody deliberately wanted to poison her ?"

"That's what it looks like. Miss Gilchrist herself doesn't seem able to help us. She keeps repeating that it's im-possible-that nobody would do such a thing. But somebody

did. You can't throw any light on the matter ?"

Susan shook her head.

"I'm simply dumbfounded," she said. "Can't you find ou,t, anything from the postmark ? Or the handwriting ?"

You've forgotten--the wrapping paper was presumably burnt. And there's a little doubt whether it came through the post at all. Young Andrews, the driver of the postal van, doesn't seem able to remember delivering it. He's got a big round, and he can't be sure--but there it is--there's a doubt about it."

"But--what's the alternative ?"

"The alternative, Mrs. Banks, is that an old piece oi brown paper was used that already had Miss Gilchrist's name and address on it and a cancelled stamp, and that the package

was pushed through the letter box or deposited inside the

door by hand to create the impression that it had come by

post."

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He added dispassionately:

"It's quite a clever idea, you know, to choose wedding

cake. Lonely middle-aged women are sentimental about

wedding cake, pleased at having been remem-bered. .3, box.

of sweets, or something of that kind might have awalrenea suspicion.

Susan said slowly:

"Miss Gilchrist speculated a good deal about who could

have sent it, but she wasn't at all suspicious--as you say, she

was pleased and yes--flattered."

She added: "Was there enough poison in it to--kill ?" "That's difficult to say until we get the quantitative

analysis. It rather depends on whether Miss Gilchrist ate the

whole of the wedge. She seems to think that she didn't. Can

you remember ?"

"No--no, I'm not sure. She offered me some and I refused

and then she ate some and said it was a very good cake, but

I don't remember if she finished it or not."

"I'd like to,go upstairs if you don't mind, Mrs. Banks." "Of course.

She followed him up to Miss Gilchrist's room. She said
apologetically:
"I'm afraid it's in a rather disgusting state. But I didn't
have time to do anything about it with my aunt's..fune[
and everything, and then after Dr. Proctor came I thougu
perhaps I ought to leave it as it was."
"That was very intelligent of you, Mrs. Banks. It's not
everyone who would have been so intelligent."
He went to the bed and slipping his hand under the pillow
raised it carefully. A slow smile spread over his face. "There you are," he said.
A piece of wedding cake lay on the sheet looking somewhat
the worse for wear.
"How extraordinary," said Susan.
"Oh no, it's not. Perhaps your generation doesn't do it.
Young lades no.w, adays mayn t se so much store on getting
married. But it s an old custom. Put a piece of wedding
cake under your pillow and you'll dream of your future
husband."
"But surely Miss Gilchrist"
"-She didn't want to tell us about it because she felt foolish
doing such a thing at her age. But I had a notion that's what
it might be." His face sobered. "And if it hadn't been
for an old maid's foolishness, Miss Gilchrist mightn't be alive today."

"But who could have possibly wanted to kill her ?"

His eyes met hers, a curious speculative look in them that made Susan feel uncomfortable.

"You don't know ? "he asked.

"No--of course I don't."

"It seems then as though we shall have to find out," said Inspector Morton.

## CHAPTER XII

Two LDERL¥m sat together in a room whose furnishings were of the most modern kind. There were no curves in the room. Everything was square. Almost the only exception was Hercule Poirot himself who was full of curves. His stomach was pleasantly rounded, his head resembled an egg in shape, and his moustaches curved upwards in a flamboyant flourish.

He was sipping a glass of sirop and looking thoughtfully at Mr. Goby.

Mr. Goby was small and spare and shrunken. He had always been refreshingly nondescript in appearance and he was now so nondescript as practically not to be there at all. He was not looking at Poirot because Mr. Goby never looked at anybody.

Such remarks as he was now making seemed to be addressed to the left-hand corner of the chrominm-plated fireplace curb.

Mr. Goby was famous for the acquiring of information. Very few people knew about him and very few employed his services--but those few were usually extremely rich. They had to be, for Mr. Goby was very expensive. His speciality was the acquiring of information quickly. At the flick of Mr. Goby's double jointed thumb, hundreds of patient questioning plodding men and women, old and young, of all apparent stations in life, were despatched to question, and probe, and achieve results.

Mr. Goby had now practically retired from business. But he occasionally "obliged" a few old patrons. Hercule Poirot was one of these.

we got what I could for you, Mr. Gob told the fire curb in a soft confidential whisper. "I sent the boys out. They do what they can--good ladsgood lads all of them, but not what they used to be in the old days. They don't come that way nowadays. Not willing to learn, that's what it is. Think they



know everything after they've only been a couple of years on the job. And they work to time. Shocking the way they work to time."

He shook his head sadly and shifted his gaze to an electric plug socket.

"It's the Government," he told it. "And all this education racket. It gives them ideas. They come back and tell us what they think. They can't think, most of them, anyway. All they know is things out of books., That's ,n,o good in our business. Bring in the answers--that s all that s needed--no thinking."

Mr. Goby flung himself back in his chair and winked at a lampshade.

"Mustn't crab the Government, though! Don't know really what we'd do without it. I can tell you that nowadays you can walk in most anywhere with a notebook and pencil, dressed right, and speaking B.B.C., and ask people all the most intimate details of their daily lives and all their back history, and what they had for dinne on November 23rd because that was a test day for mid.qe-class incomes--or whatever it happens to be (making it a grade above to butter them up l)--ask 'em any mortal thing you can; and nine times out of ten they'll come across pat, and even the tenth time though they may cut up rough, they won't doubt for a minute that you're what you say you are--and that the Government really wants to know--for some completely unfathomable reason! I can tell you, M. Poirot," said Mr. Goby, still talking to the lampshade, "that it's the best line we've ever had; much better than taking the electric meter or tracing a fault in the telephone--yes, or than calling as nuns, or the Girl Guides or the Boy Scouts asking for subscriptions--tho,ugh

we use all those too. Yes, Government snoop,

ing is God s gift to investigators and long may it continue I

Poirot did not speak. Mr. Goby had grown a little garrulous

with advancing years, but he would come to the point in his

own good time.

"Ar," said Mr. Goby and took out a very scrubby little

notebook. He licked his finger and flicked, over the pages. "Here we are. Mr. George Crossfield. We 11 take him first.

Just the plain facts. You won't want to know how I got them.

He's been in Queer Street for quite a while now. Horses,

mostly, and gambling---he's not a great one for women. Goes

over to France now and then, and Monte too. Spends a lot

of time at the Casino. Too downy to cash cheques there, but

gets hold of a lot more money than his travelling 'allowance to0

would account for. I didn't go into that, because it wasn't

what you want to know. But he's not scrupulous about

evading the law--and being a lawyer he knows how to do it.

Some reason to believe that he's been using, trust funds

ent.rp, sted, to him .to invest. Plunging pretty wildly of late--on

me tock Exchange and on the gee-gees I Badjudgment

and bad luck. Been off his feed badly for three months.

Worried, bad-tempered and irritable in the office. But since

his uncle's death that's all changed. He's like the breakfast

eg,g,s (if we had 'em). Sunny side up I

Now, as to particular information asked for. Statement that he was at Hurst Park races on day in question almost certainly untrue. Almost invariably places bets with one or other of two bookies on the course. They didn't see him that day. Possible that he left Paddington by train for destination unknown. Taxi-driver who took fare to Paddington made doubtful identification of his photograph. But I wouldn't ba k on t. He s a IF common type--nothing outstanding about him. -N,,o sui"with porters, etc., at Paddington. Certainly didn t arri/rF"at Cholsey Station--which is nearest for Lytchett St. Mary. Small station, strangers noticeable. Could have got out at Reading and taken bus. Buses there crowded, frequent and several routes go within a mile or so of Lytchett St. Mary as well as the bus service that goes right into the village. He wouldn't take that--not if he meant business. All in all, he's a downy card. Wasn't seen in Lytchett St. Mary but he needn't have been. Other ways of approach than through the village. Was in the OUDS at Oxford, by the way. If he went to the cottage that day he mayn't have looked quite like the usual George Crossfield. I 11 ke,e,p, hm m my boo,k,, shall I ? There s a black market angle I d like to play up.

"You may keep him in," said Hercnle Poirot.

Mr. Goby licked his finger and turned another page of his notebook.

"Mr. Michael Shane. He's thought quite a lot of in the profession. I-las an even better idea of himself than other people have. Wants to star and wants to star quickly. Fond of money and doing himself well. Very attractive to women. They fall for him right and left. He's partial to them himself .nbU.t busine c.omes first, as you .might say. He's been rang arouna vnth Sorrel Dainton Who was playing the lead m the last show he was in. He only had a minor part but made

uite a hit in i,t, and Miss Dainton's husband doesn't like him. is wife doesnt know about him and Miss Dainton. Doesn't

know much about anything, it seems. Not much of an actress I gather, but easy on the eye. Crazy about her husband. Some rumour of a bust-up likely between them not long ago, but that seems out now. Out since/dr. Richard Abernethie's death."

Mr. Goby emphasised the last point by nodding his head significantly at a cushion on the sofa.

"On the day in question, Mr. Shane says he was meeting a Mr. Rosenheim and a Mr. Oscar Lewis to fix up some stage business. He didn't meet them. Sent them a wire to say he was terribly sorry he couldn't make it. What he did d,o was

to go to the Emeraldo Car people, who hire out drive yourself ' cars. He hired a car about twelve o'clock and drove away in it. He returned it about six in the evening. According to the speedometer it had been driven just about the right number of miles for what we're after. No confirmation from Lytchett St. Mary. No strange car seems to have been observed there that day. Lots of places it could be left unnoticed a mile or so away. And there's even a disused quarry a few hundred yards down the lane from the cottage. Three market towns within walking distance where you can park in side streets, without the olice bothering about you.

All right, we keep Mr. Shane in ?

"Most certainly."

"Now Mrs. Shane." Mr. Goby rubbed his nose and told his left cuff about Mrs. Shane. "She says she was shopping. Just shopping..." Mr. Goby raised his eyes to the ceiling. "Women who are shopping--just scatty, that's what they are. And she'd heard she'd come into money the day before. Naturally there'd be no holding her. She has one or two charge accounts but they're overdrawn and they've been pressing ,h, er for payment and she didn't put any more on the sheet. It s quite on the cards that she went in here and there

and everywhere, trying on clothes, looking at iewellery,

ricing this, that, and t, he other--and as likel,y, as not, not uying anything l She s easy to approach--I 11 say that. I had one of my young ladies who's knowledgeable on the theatrical line do a hook up. Stopped by her table in a restaurant and exclaimed the way they do: "Darling, I haven't seen you since Way Down Under. You were tond,rfl in that l Have you seen Hubert lately ?" That was the producer and Mrs. Shane was a bit of a flop in the play--but that makes it go all the better. They're chatting theatrical stuff at once, and, my girl throws the right names about, and then she says, I believe I caught a glimpse of



you at so and so, on so and so, giving the day--and most ladies fall for it and say, ' Oh no, I was ' whatever it may be. But not Mrs. Shane. Just looks vacant and says, ' Oh, I dare say.' What can you do with a lady like that ?" Mr. Goby shook his head severely at the radiator.

"Nothing," said Hercule Poirot with feeling. "Do I not have cause to know it ? Never shall I forget the killing of

Lord Edgware. I was nearly defeated--yes, I, Hercule

Poirot--by the extremely simple cunning of a vacant brain.

The very simple minded have often the genius to commit an

uncomplicated crime and then leave it alone. Let us hope

that our murderer--if there is a murderer in this affair--is

intelligent and superior and thoroughly pleased with himself

and unable to resist painting the Iffy. Enn--but continue"

Once more Mr. Goby applied hirself this little book. '

"Mr. and Mrs. Bankswho said they were at home all day. She wasn't, anyway I Went round to the garage, got out her

car, and drove off in it about r o'clock. Destination unknown.'

Back about five. Can't tell about mileage because she's had

it out every day since and it's been nobody's business to

check.

"As to Mr. Banks, we've dug up something curious. To

begin with, I'll mention that on the day in question we don't

know what he did. He didn't go to work. Seems he'd already

asked for a couple of days off on account of the funeral.

And since then he's chucked his job--with no consideration

for the firm. Nice, well-established small pharmacy it is.

They're not too keen on Master Banks. Seems he used to get

into rather queer excitable states.

"Well, as I say, we don't know what he was doing on the

day of Mrs. L.'s death. He didn't go with his wife. It could be that he stopped in their little flat all day. There's no

porter there, and nobody knows whether tenants are in or out.

But his back history is interesting. Up till about four months ago--just before he met his wife, he was in a Mental Home. Not certified--just what the. y call a mental breakdown. Seems he made some slip up m dispensing a medicine. (He was working with a Mayfair firm then.) The woman recovered, and the firm were all over themselves apologising, and there was no prosecution. After all, these accidental slips do occur, and most decent people are sorry for a Door voun¢ chao who's done it--so long as there's no prmanei harm d)ne, t*hat is. The firm didn't sack him, but he resigned---said it had shaken his nerve. But afterwards, it seems, he got into a very low state and told the doctor he was obsessed by guilt--that it



had all been deliberate--the woman had been overbearing and rude to him when she came into the shop, had complained that her last prescription had been badly made up--and that he had resented this and had deliberately added a near lethal dose of some drug or other. He said ' She had to be punished for daring to speak to me like that l ' And then wept and said he was too wicked to live and a lot of things like that. The medicos have a long word for that sort of thing--guilt complex or something--and don't believe it was deliberate at all, just carelessness, but that he wanted to make it important and

serious."

"Fa se p,ut," said Hercule Poirot.

"Pardon ? Anyway, he went into this Sanitorium and they treated him and discharged him as cured, and he met Miss Abernethie as she was then. And he got a job in this respectable but rather obscure little chemist's shop. Told them he'd been out of England for a year and a half, and gave them his former reference from some shop in Eastbourne. Nothing against him in that shop, but a fellow dispenser said he had a very queer temper and was odd in his manner sometimes. There's a story about a customer saying once as a joke, ' Wish you'd sell me something to poison my wife, ha hal' And Banks says to him, very soft and quiet: 'I could... It would cost you two hundred pounds.' The man felt uneasy and laughed it off. May have been all a i,oke, but it doesn't seem to me that Banks is the joking kind.

"Mon ami," said Hercule Poirot. "It really mazes me how you get your information I Medical and highly confidential most of it I"

Mr. Goby's eyes swivelled right round the room and he murmured, looking expectantly at the door, that there were ways ....

"Now we come to the country department. Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Abernethie. Very nice place they've got, but sadly needing money spent on it. Very straitened they seem to be, very straitened. Taxation and unfortunate investments.

Mr. Abernethie enjoys ill health and the emphasis is on the enjoyment. Complains a lot and has everyone running and fetching and carrying. Eats hearty meals, and seems quite strong physically if he likes to make the effort. There's no one in the house after the daily woman goes and no one's allowed into Mr. Abernethie's room unless he rings his bell. He was in a very bad temper the morning of the day after the funeral. Swore at Mrs. Jones. Ate only a little of his breakfast and said he wouldn't have any lunch--he'd had a bad



night. He said the supper she had left out for him was unfit to eat and a good deal more. He was alone in the house and unseen by anybody from 9.30 that morning until the following morning."

"And Mrs. Abernethie ?"

"She started off from Enderby by car at the time you mentioned. Arrived on foot at a small local garage in a place called Cathstone and explained her car had broken down a couple of miles away.

"A mechanic drove her out to it, made an investigation and said they'd have to tow it in and it would be a long job--couldn't promise to finish it that day. The lady was very put out, but went to a small inn, arranged to stay the night, and asked for some sandwiches as she said she'd like to see some~

thing of the countryside--it's on the edge of the moorland

country. She didn't come back to the inn till quite late that

evening. My informant said he didn't wonder. It's a sordid

little place I"

"And the times ?"

"She got the sandwiches at eleven. If she'd walked to the

main road, a mile, she could have hitch-hiked into Wallcaster

and caught a special South Coast express which stops at

Reading West. I won't go into details of buses etcetera. It could just have been done if you could make the--er--attack

fairly late in the afternoon.

"I understand the doctor stretched the time limit to

possibly 4.30."

"Mind you," said Mr. Goby," I shouldn't say it was likely.

She seems to be a nice lady, liked by every,body.

She's

devoted to her husband, treats him like a child.

"Yes, yes, the maternal complex."

"She's strong and hefty, chops the wood and often hauls

in great baskets of logs. Pretty good with the inside of a car,

tO0."

"I was coming to that. What exactly was wrong with the

car ?"

"Do you want the exact details, M. Poirot ?"

"Heaven forbid. I have no mechanical knowledge."

"It was a difficult thing to spot. And also to put right.

And it could have been done maliciously by someone without

very much trouble. By someone who was familiar with the

insides of a car."

"C'est magniique I" said Poirot with bitter enthusiasm.

11 so convenient, all so possible. Bon deu, can we chromate

nobody ? And Mrs. Leo Abernethie ?"

xo5

"She's a very nice lady, too. Mr. Abernethie deceased was

very fond of her. She came there to stay about a fortnight

before he died."

"After he had been to Lytchett St. Mary to see his sister ?"

"No, just before. Her income is a good deal reduced since

the war. She gave up her house in England and took a small flat in London. She has a villa in Cyprus and spends part of

the year there. She has a young nephew whom she is helping

to educate, and there seems to be one or two, young artists

whom she helps financially from time to time. '

"St. Helen of the blameless life," said Po[rot, shutting his

eyes. "And it was quite impossible for her to have left

Enderby that day without the servants knowing ? Say that

that is so, I implore you I"

Mr. Goby brought his glance acrdss to rest apologetically on

Poirot's polished patent leather shoe, the nearest he had come

to a direct encounter, and murmured:

"I'm afraid I can't say that, M. Poirot. Mrs. Abernethie

went to London to fetch some extra clothes and belongings as

she had agreed with Mr. Entwhistle to stay on and see to

things."

"Il ne manquait que fa I" said Poirot with strong feeling.

## CHAPTER XIII

WEN TIE CAR) of Inspector Morton of the Berkshire County

Police was brought to Hercule Poirot, his eyebrows went up.

"Show him in, Georges, show him in. And bring--what is it that the police prefer ?"

"I would suggest beer, sir."

"How horrible I But how British. Bring beer, then."

Inspector Morton came straight to the point.

"I had to come to London," he said. "And I got hold of your address, M. Po[rot. I was interested to see you at the request on Thursday."

"So you saw me there ?"

"Yes. I was surprised--and, as I say, interested. You won't remember me but I remember you very well. In that Pangbourne Case."

"Ah, you were connected with that ?"

"Only in a very junior, capacity. It's a long time ago but I've never forgotten you.

"And you recognised me at once the other day ?"



"That wasn't difficult, sir." Inspector Morton repressed a slight smile. "Your appearance is-rather unusual."

His gaze took in Poirot's sartorial perfection and rested finally on the curving moustaches.

"You stick out in a country place," he smd.

"It is possible, it is possible," said Poirot with com-placency.

"It interested me wh, you should be there. That sort of c ',r,m, , erobbery--assault--doesn't usually interest you."

' Was !t the us,u, al ordinary brntM type of crime ?"

"That s what I ye been wondering."

"You

have wondered from the beginning, have you not ?"

"Yes, M. Poirot. There were some unusual features. Since then we've worked along the routine lines. Pulled in one or two people for questioning, but everyone has been able to

accou, nt quite satisfactori!y for his ,time that afternoon. It wasn t what you'd call an ordinary crime, M. Poirot--we're

quite sure of that. The Chief Constable rees. It was done by someone who wished to make it appear that way. It could have been the Gilchrist woman, but there doesn't seem to be any motive---and there wasn't any emotional back-ground. Mrs. Lansquenet was perhaps a bit mental--or

' simple,' if yon like to put it that way, but it was a household of mistress and do§sbody with no feverish feminine friendship about it. There are dozens of Miss Gfichrists about, and

the're not usuMly the murdering type."

He paused.

"So it looks as though we'd have to look farther afield.
I came to ask if you could help us at all. Something must have brou§ht you down there, M. Poirot."

"Yes, yes, something did. An excellent Daimler car. But not only that."

"You had--information ?"

"Hardly in your sense of the word. Nothing that could be used as evidence."

"But something that could bea pointer ?"

"Yes."

"You see, M. Poirot, there have been developments."

Meticulously, in detail, he told of the poisoned wedge of wedding cake.

Poirot took a deep hissing breath.

ngemous--yes, ngemous... I warned Mr. Entwhistle

to look after Miss Gilchrist. An attack on her was always a

p

ossibility. But I must confess that I did not expect poison.

anticipated a repetition of the hatchet motif. I merely

thought that it would be inadvit.e for her to walk alone in

unfrequented lanes after dark."

"But why did you anticipate.a, ttack on her ? I think

M. Poirot, you ought to tell me

Poirot nodded his head slowl

"Yes I will tell you Mr I,,, .histle will not tell you,

because'he is a lawfer knd 1.. .")t0!,?s do. no, like, to s, pea,k o!

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averse to my telling you--no, ii':;r?ll b.e re!ieved.. He ds not wish to appear foolish or

know what may--only may--bii,:;,,'i;::facts.

Poirot paused as George entelil'tl,:.i,th a ta gla.ss.o,f, beer.

"Some refreshment, Inspect%,,# o, no, I msst.

"Won't you join me ?"

"I do not drink the beer. lz[ll will myself .hav. e a glass of sirop de ¢sisthe English k'i,: do not care for it, I have noticed."

Inspector Morton looked grali;,..kt':llly, at his beer. Poirot, sipping delicately fr.:iiil,adhis glass of dark purple fluid, said:

"It begins, all this, at a fur,'.t':.- Or rather, to be exact, after the funeral."

Graphically, with many gest :i he set forth the story as Mr. Entwhistle had told t to t:i:i" but with such embellishments as his exuberant naturet ?ggested. One a. lmost felt irot had himsei" een an eve-witness of the that Hercule scene.

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Inspector Morton had

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seized at once on what were, iit.

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points.

"This Mr. Abernethie may

"It is a possibility."

"And the body has beend ;mated and there is no

evidence?"

"Exactly."

Inspector Morton ruminated.

"Interesting. There's nothiii lili it for .- Nothing, that

is, to make Richard Abernethiivi,ieath worth investigating.

It would be waste of time."

"Yes."

"But there are the eole--t.,:;!l':'eople who were there--the

people who heard Cora Lansqu%l.f,aY .wh. at she .d, id, a.nd one

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thought that it would be inadvisable for her to walk alone in

unfrequented lanes after dark."

"But mhy did you anticipate an attack on her ? I think

M. Poirot, you ought to tell me that."

Poirot nodded his head slowly.

"Yes, I will tell you. Mr. Entwhistle will not tell you, because he is a lawyer and lawyers do not like to speak of suppositions, of inferences made from the character of a dead woman, or from a few irresponsible words. But he will not be averse to my telling you--no, he will be relieved. He does not wish to appear foolish or fanciful, but he wants you to know what may--only may--be the facts."

Poirot paused as George entered with a tall glass of beer.
"Some refreshment, Inspector. No, no, I insist."
"Won't you join me ?"

"I do not drink the beer. But I will myself have a glass of sirop de cassis--the English they do not care for it, I have noticed."

Inspector Morton looked gratefully at his beer.

Poirot, sipping delicately from his glass of dark purple fluid, said:

"It begins, all this, at a funeral. Or rather, to be exact, after the funeral."

Graphically, with many gestures, he set forth the story as Mr. Entwhistle had told it to him, but with such embellish-ments as his exuberant nature suggested. One almost felt that Hercule Poirot had himself been an eye-witness of the scene.

Inspector Morton had an excellent clear-cut brain. He seized at once on what were, for his purposes, the salient points.

"This Mr. Abernethie may have been poisoned ?"

"It is a possibility."

"And the body has been cremated and there is no evidence?"

"Exactly."

Inspector Morton ruminated.

"Interesting. There's nothin,g in it for us. Nothing, that is, to make Richard Abernethie s death worth investigating.

It would be waste of time."

"Yes."

"But there are the people--the people who were there--the people who heard Cora Lansquenet say what she did, and one of whom may have thought that she might say it again and with more detail."

"As she undoubtedly would have. There are, Inspector, as you say, the people. And now you see why I was at the inquest, why I interest myself in the case--because it is, always, people in whom I interest myself."

"Then the attack on Miss Gilchrist- "

"Was always indicated. Richard Abernethie had been down to the cottage. He had talked to Cora. He had, perhaps, actually mentioned a name. The only person who might possibly have known or overheard something was Miss Gilchrist. After Cora is silenced, the murderer might continue to be aaaxious. Does the other woman know something--anything ? Of course, if the murderer is wise he will let well alone, but murderers, Inspector, are seldom wise. Fortunately for us. They brood, they feel uncertain, they desire to make sure---quite sure. They are pleased with their own cleverness. And so, in the end, they protrude their 'necks, asyou say."

Inspector lIorton smiled faintly.

Poirot went on:

"This attempt to silence Miss Gilchrist, already it is a mistake. For now there are two occasions about which you make inquiry. There is the handwriting on the wedding label also. It is a pity the wrapping paper was burnt."

"Yes, I could have been certain, then, whether it came by post or whether it didn't."

"You have reason for thinking the latter, you say ?" "It's only what the postman thinks--he's not sure. If the parcel had gone through a village post office, it's ten to one the postmistress would have noticed it, but nowadays the mail is delivered by van from arket Keynes and of course the young chap does quite a rouhd and delivers a lot of things. He thinks it was letters only and no parcel at the cottage--but he isn't sure. As a matter of fact he's having a bit of girl trouble and he can't think about anything else. I've tested his memory and he isn't reliable in any way. If he did deliver it, it seems to me odd that the parcel shouldn't have been noticed until after this Mr.

whatshisname--Guthrie

"

"Ah, Mr. Guthrie."

Inspector Morton smiled.

"Yes, M. Poirot. We're checking up on him. After all, it would be ea;y, wouldn't it, to come along with a plausible

tale of having been a friend of Mrs. Lansquenet's. Mrs. Banks wasn't to know if he was or he wasn't. He could have dropped tat little parcel, you know. It's easy to make a thing look as though it's been through the post. Lamp black a little

smudged, makes quite a good postmark cancellation mark over a staxnp."

He paused and then added:

"And there are other possibilities."

Poirot nodded.

"You think----- ?"

"Mr. George Crossfield was down in that part of the world ---but not until the next day. Meant to attend the funeral, but had a little engine trouble on the way. Know anything about him, M. Poirot ?"

"A little. But not as much as I would -like to know." "Like that, is it ? Quite a little bunch interested in the late Mr. Abernethie's will, I understand. I hope it doesn't mean going after all of them."

"I have accumulated a little information. It is at your disposal. Naturally I have no authority to ask these peo,,ple questions. In, fact it would not be wise for me to do so.

"I shall go slowly myself. You don't want to fluster your bird too soon. But when you do fluster it, you want to fluster it well."

"A very sound technique. For you then, my friend, the

routine--with all the machinery you „have at your disposal.

It is slow--but sure. For myself.

"Yes, bi. Poirot ?"

"For myself, I go North. As I have told you, it is people in whom I interest myself. Yes--a little preparatory camoufiagemand I go North.

"I intend," added Hercule Poirot, "to purchase a country

mansion,, An-hatf°r f,oreigns U.N.A.R,C.o.refugees' ?I,„represent U.N.A.R.C.O."

"United Nations Aid for Refugee Centres Organisation. It

sounds well, do you not think ?"

Inspector Morton grinned.

## CHAPTER XIV

HERCULE POIROT said to a grim-faced Janet:

"Thank you very much. You have been most kind."

Janet, her lips still fixed in a sour line, left the room. These

foreigners I The questions they asked. Their impertinence I

All very well to say that he was a specialist interested in unsuspected

heart conditions such as Mr. Abernethie must have

suffered from. That was very likely true--gone very sudden

No

the master had, and the doctor had been surprised. But

what business was it of some foreign doctor coming along and

nosing around ?

All very well for Mrs. Leo to say: "Please answer Monsieur Pontarlier's questions. He has a good reason for asking." Questions. Always questions. Sheets of them sometimes to fill in as best you could--and what did the Government or anyone else want to know about your private affairs for ? Asking your age at that censusclownright impertinent and she hadn't told them, either l Cut off five years she had. Why not ? If she only felt fifty-four, she'd call herself fifty-four I At any rate Monsieur Pontarlier hadn't wanted to know her age. He'd had some decency. Just questions about the medicines the master had taken, and where they were kept, and if, perhaps, he might have taken too much of them if he was feeling not quite the thing--or if he'd been forgetful. As though she could remember all that rubbish--the master knew what he was doing I And asking if any of the medicines he took were still in the house. Naturally they'd all been thrown away. Heart condition--and some long word he'd used. Always thinking of something new they were, these doctors. Look at them telling old Rogers he had a disc or some such in his spine. Plain lumbago, that was all that was the matter with him. Her father had been a gardener and he'd suffered from lumbago. Doctors I

The self-appointed medical man sighed and went downstairs in search of Lanscombe. He had not got very much out of Janet but he had hardly expected to do so. All he had really

wanted to do was to check such information as could unwill~

ingly be extracted from her with that given him by Helen

Abernethie and which had been obtained from the same

source--but with much less difficulty, since Janet was ready

to admit that Mrs. Leo had a perfect right to ask such questions

and indeed Janet herself had enjoyed dwelling at length on

the last few weeks of her master's life. Illness and death

were congenial subjects to her.

Yes, Poirot thought, he could have relied on the information

that Helen had got for him. He had done so really. But by

nature and long habit he trusted nobody until he himself had

tried and proved them.

In any case the evidence was slight and unsatisfactory. It

boiled down to the fact that Richard Abernethie had been

prescribed vitamin oil capsules. That these had been in a

large bottle which had been nearly finished at the time of

III

his death. Anybody who had wanted to, could have operated on one or more of those capsules with a hypodermic syringe

and could have rearranged the bottle so that the fatal dose

would only be taken some weeks after that somebody had

left the house. Or someone might have slipped into the house

on the day before Richard Abernethie died and have doctored

a capsule then-or, which was more likely--have substituted something else for a sleeping tablet in the little bottle that stood beside the bed. Or again might have quite simply tampered with the food or drink.

Hercule Poirot had made his own experiments. The front door was kept locked, but there was a side door giving on the garden which was not locked until evening. At about quarter-past one, when the gardeners had gone to lunch and when the household was in the dining-room, Poirot had entered the grounds, come to the side door, and mounted the stairs to Richard Abernethie's bedroom without meeting anybody. As a variant he had pushed through a baize door and slipped into the larder. He had heard voices from the kitchen at the end of the passage but no one had seen him.

Yes, it could have been done. But had it been done ?

There was nothing to indicate that that was so. Not that Poirot was really looking for evidence--he wanted only to satisfy himself as to possibilities. The murder of Richard Abernethie could only be a hypothesis. It was Cora Lansquenet's murder for which evidence was needed. What he wanted was to study the people who had been assembled for the funeral that day, and to form his own conclusions about them. He already had his plan, but first he wanted a few more words with old Lanscombe.

Lanscombe was courteous but distant. Less resentful than Janet, he nevertheless regarded this upstart foreigner as the

materialisation of the Writing on the Wall. This was What

We are Coming to I

He put down the leather with which he was lovingly polishing

the Georgian teapot and straightened his back.

"Yes, sir ? "he said politely.

Poirot sat down gingerly on a pantry stool.

"Mrs. Abernethie tells me that you hoped to reside in the

lodge by the north gate when you retired from service here ?"

"That is so, sir. Nat,u, rally all that is changed now. When

the property is sold--

Poirot interrupted deftly:

"It might still be possible. There are cottages for the

gardeners. The lodge is not needed for the guests or their



attendants. It might be possible to make an arrangement of

some kind."

"Well, thank you, sir, for the suggestion. But I hardly

thinkThe

majority of the--guests would be foreigners,

I presume ?"

"Yes, they will be foreigners. Amongst those who fled from Europe to this country are several who are old and infirm. There can be no future for them if they return to their own countries, for these persons, you understand, are those whose relatives there have perished. They cannot earn their living here as an able-bodied man or woman can do. Funds have been raised and are being administered by the organisation which I represent to endow various country homes for them.

This place is, I think, eminently suitable.

The matter is

practically settled."

Lanscombe sighed.

"You'll understand, sir, that it's sad for me to think that this won't be a private dwelling-house any longer. But I know how things are nowadays. None of the family could afford to live here--and I don't think the young ladies and gentlemen would even want to cio so. Domestic help is too difficult to obtain these days, and even if obtained is expensive and unsat-isfactory. I quite realise that these fine mansions have served their turn." Lanscombe sighed again. "If it has to

be an--an institution of some kind, I'll be glad to think that it's the kind you're mentioning. We were Spared in This Country, sir, owing to our Navy and Air Force and our brave young men and being fortunate enough to be an island. If Hitler had landed here we'd all have turned out and given him short shrift. My sight isn't good enough for shooting, but I could have used a pitchfork, sir, and I intended to do so if necessary. We've always welcomed the unfortunate in this country, sir, it's been our pride. We shall continue so to do."

"Thank you, Lanscombe," said Poirot gently. "Your master's death must have been a great blow to you."

"It was, sir. I'd been with the master since he was quite a young man. I've been very fortunate in my life, sir. No one could have had a better master."

"I have been conversing with my friend and--er colleague, Dr. Larraby. We were wondering if your master could have had any extra worry--any unpleasant interview--on the day before he died ? You do not remember if any visitors came to the house that day ?"

"I think not, sir. I do not recall any."

"No one called at all just about that time ? '°

"The vicar was here to tea the day before. Otherwise--

some nuns called for a subscription--and a young man came

to the back door and wanted to sell Marjorie some brushes and

saucepan cleaners. Very persistent he was. Nobody else."

A worried expression had appeared on Lanscombe's face.

Poirot did not press him further. Lanscombe had already

unburdened himself to Mr. Entwhistle. He would be far less

forthcoming with Hercule Poirot.

With Marjorie, on the other hand, Poirot had had instant

success. Marjorie had none of the conventions of "good

service." Marjorie was a first-class cook and the way to her

heart lay through her cooking. Poirot had visited her in the

kitchen, praised certain dishes with discernment, and Marjorie, realising that here was someone who knew what he was talking about, hailed him immediately as a fellow spirit. He had no difficulty in finding out exactly what had been served the night before Richard Abernethie had died. Marjorie, indeed, was inclined to view the matter as" It was the night I made that chocolate souffi that Mr. Abernethie died. Six eggs I'd saved up for it. The dairyman he's a friend of mine. Got hold of some cream too. Better not ask how. Enjoyed it, Mr. Aber nethie did." The rest of the meal was likewise detailed. What had come out from the dining-room had been finished in the kitchen. Ready as/larjorie was to talk, Poirot had learned nothing of value from her.

He went now to fetch his overcoat and a couple of scarves, and thus padded against the North Country air he went out on the terrace and joined Helen Abernethie, who was clipping some late roses.

"Have you found out anything fresh ?" she asked.

"Nothing. But I hardly expected to do so."

"I know. Ever since Mr. Entwhistle told me you were coming, I've been ferreting round, but there's really been nothing."

She paused and said hopefully:

"Perhaps it is all a mare's nest ?"

"To be attacked with a hatchet ?"

"I wasn't thinking of Cora."

"But it is of Cora that I think. Why was it necessary for

someone to kill her ? Mr. Entwhistle has told me that on that

day, at the moment that she came out suddenly with her

gaff`z,,, you yourself felt that something was wrong.

That is

so?

"Wellwyes, but I don't know "

Poirot swept on.

"How ' wrong' ? Unexpectecl ? Surprising ? Or--what

shall we say--uneasy ? Sinister ?"

"Oh no, not sinister. Just SOmething that wasn't---oh, I

don't know. I can't remember and it WaSl,'t important."

"But why cannot you remember--because something else

put, it out of your head--so, mething more important ?"

Yes--yes--I think you re right there. It was themention

of murder, I suppose. That swelt away everything else."

"It was, perhaps, the reaction of some particular person to

the word ' murder' ?"

"Perhaps... But I don't renaember looking at anyone in particular. We were all staring at Cora."

"It may have been something you heard--something dropped perhaps.., or broken. , ."

Helen frowned in an effort of remembrance.

"No... Idon'tthinkso..."

"Ah well, someday it will con'se back. And it may be of no consequence. Now tell me, Madame, of those here, who knew Cora best ?"

Helen considered.

"Lanscombe, I suppose. He remembers her from a child. The housemaid, Janet, only cam after she had married and gone away."

"And next to Lanscombe ?"

Helen said thoughtfully: "I suppose--/ did. Maude hardly knew her at all."

"Then, taking you as the person who knew her best, why do you think she asked that queation as stxe did ?"

Helen smiled.

"It was very characteristic of Coral"

"What I mean is, was it a btise pure and simple ? Did she just blurt out what was in her rrtind without thinking ? Or was she being malicious--amusing herself by upsetting everyone ?"

Helen reflected.

"You can't ever be quite sure about a person, can you ?

I never have known whether Cra was just ingenuous--or whether she counted, childishly, an making an effect. That's

what you mean, isn't it ?"

"Yes. I was thinking: Suplhose this Mrs. Cora says to

herself' What fun it would be to ask if Richard was murdered

and see how they all look I ' That would be like her, yes ?"

Helen looked doubtful.

"It might be. She certainly had an impish sense of humour

as a child. But what difference does it make ?"

"It would underline the point that it is unwise to make

jokes about murder," said Poirot dryly.

Helen shivered. "Poor Cora."

Poirot changed the subject.

"Mrs. Timothy Abernethie stayed the night after the

funeral ?"

"Yes."

"Did she talk to you at all about what Cora had said ?"

"Yes, she said it was outrageous and just like Cora I"

"She didn't take it seriously ?" "Oh, no. No, I'm sure she didn't."

The second "no," Poirot thought, had sounded suddenly

doubtful. But was not that almost always the case when

you went back over something in your mind ?

"And you, Madame, did you take it seriously ?"

Helen Abernethie, her eyes looking very blue and strangely young under the sideways sweep of crisp grey hair, said thoughtfully:

"Yes, M. Poirot, I think I did."

"Because of your feeling that something was wrong ?"

"Perhaps."

He waited--but as she said nothing more, he went on:

"There had been an estrangement, lasting many years, between Mrs. Lansquenet and her family ?"

"Yes. None of us liked her husband and she was offended about it, and so the estrangement grew."

"And then, suddenly, your brother-in-law went to see her. W,,y ?" ,

I don t know--I suppose he knew, or guessed, that he hadn't very long to live and wanted to be reconciled but I really don't know."

"He didn't tell you ?"

"Tell rne ?"

"Yes. You were here, staying with him, just before he went there. He didn't even mention his intention to you ?"

He thought a slight reserve came into her manner.

"He told me that he was going to see his brother Timothy mwhich he did. He never mentioned Cora at all. Shall we go in ? It must be nearly lunchtime."

She walked beside him carrying the flowers she had picked.

As they went in by the side door, Poirot said:

"You are sure, quite sure, that during your visit, Mr.

Abernethie said nothing to you about any member of the family which might be relevant ?"

A faint resentment in her'manner, Helen said:

"You are speaking like a policeman."

"I was a policeman--once. I have no status--no right to question you. But you want the truth---or so I have been led to believe ?"

They entered the green drawing-room. Helen said with a sigh:

"Richard was disappointed in the younger generation. Old men usually are. He disparaged them in various ways---' but there was nothing--nothing, do you understand--that co,u, ld p,o, ssibly suggest a motive for murder."

' Ah, said Poirot. She reached for a Chinese bowl, and

began to arrange the roses in it. When they were disposed to her satisfaction she looked round for a place to put it.

"You arrange flowers admirably, Madame," said Hercule. "I think that anything you undertook you would manage to do with perfection."

"Thank you. I am fond of flowers. I think this would look well on that green malachite table."

There was a bouquet of wax flowers under a glass shade on the malachite table. As she lifted it off, Poirot said casually:

"Did anyone tell Mr. Abernethie that his niece Susan's husband had come near to poisoning a customer when making

up a prescription ? Ah, pardon I"

He sprang forward.

The Victorian ornament had slipped from Helen's fingers. Poirot's spring forward was not quick enough. It dropped on the floor and the glass shade broke. Helen gave an expression of annoyance.

"How careless of me. However, the flowers are not damaged. I can get a new glass shade made for it. I'll put it away in the big cupboard under the stairs."

It was not until Poirot had helped her to lift it on to a shelf in the dark cupboard and had followed her back to the drawing-room that he said:

"It was my fault. I should not have startled you."

"What was it that you asked me ? I have forgotten."

"Oh, there is no need to repeat my question. Indeed--I have forgotten what it was."

Helen came up to him. She laid her hand on his arm.

"M. Poirot, is there anyone whose life would really bear close investigation ? Must people's lives be dra,,gged into this when they have nothing to do with--with

"With the death of Cora Lasquenet ? Yes. Because one has to examine everything. Oh l it is true enough--it is an



old maxim--everyone has something to hide. It is true of all of us--it is perhaps true of you, too, Madame. But I say to you, nothing can be ignored. That is why your friend, Mr. Ent-whistle, he has come to me. For I am not the police. I am

discreet and what I learn does not concern me. But I have to know. And since in this matter is not so much evidence as

a

Ople--then it is people with whom I occupy myself. I need, dame, to meet everyone who was here on the day of the funeral. And it would be a great convenience--yes, and it would be strategically satisfactory--if I could meet them here."

"I'm afraid," Helen said slowly, "that that would be too difficulty"

"Not so difficult as you think. Already I have devised a means. The house, it is sold. $o Mr. Entwhistle will declare. (Entendu, sometimes these things fall through 1) He will invite the various member of the family to assemble here and to choose what they will from the furnishings before it is all put up to auction. A suitable week-end can be selected for that purpose."

„He paused and then said:

You see, it is easy, is it not ?"

Helen looked at him. The blue eves were cold--almost

fr°"se*' you laying a trap for someone, M. Poirot ?"

"Alas I I wish I knew enough. No, I have still the open mind."

"There may," Hercule Poirot added thoughtfully, "be certain tests..."

"Tests ? What kind of tests ?"

"I have not yet formulated them to myself. And in any case, Madame, it would be better that you should not know them."

"So that I can be tested too ?"

"You, Madame, have been taken behind the scenes. Now there is one thing that is doubtful. The young people will, I think, come readily. But it may be difficult, may it not, to secure the presence here of Mr. Timothy Abernethie. I hear

that he never leaves home."

Helen smiled suddenly.

"I believe you may be lucky there, M. Poirot. I heard from Maude yesterday. The workmen are in painting the house and Timothy is suffering terribly from the smell of the paint. He says that it is seriously affecting his health. I think that he and Maude would both be pleased to come here--perhaps



for a week or two. Maude is still not able to get about very wellwyou know she broke her ankle ?"

"I had not heard. How unfortunate."

"Luckily they have got Cora's companion, Miss Gilchrist. It seems that she has turned out a perfect treasure."

"What is that ?" Poirot turned sharply on Helen. "Did they ask for Miss Gilchrist to go to them ? Who suggested it ?"

"I think Susan fixed it up. Susan Banks."

"Aha," said Poirot in a curious voice. "So it was the little Susan who suggested it. She is fond of making the arrangements."

"Susan struck me as being a very competent girl."

"Yes. She is competent. Did you hear that Miss Gilchrist had a narrow escape from death with a piece of poisoned

wedding cake ?"

"No I" Helen looked startled. "I do remember now that /laude said over the telephone that Miss Gilchrist had just come out of hospital but I'd no idea why she had been in hospital. Poisoned ? But, 3/I. Poirot--why ?"

"Do you really ask that ?"

Helen said with sudden vehemence:

"Oh! get them all here l Find out the truth l There mustn't be any more murders." "So you will co-operate ?"

"Yes--I will cooperate."

## CHAPTER XV

"T}A? r. INOr.UXi does look nice, Mrs. Jones. What a hand you have with lino. The teapot's on the kitchen table, so go and help yourself. I'll be there as soon as I've taken up Mr. Abernethie's elevenses."

Miss Gilchrist trotted up the staircase; carrying a daintily set out tray. She tapped on Timothy s door, interpreted a growl from within as an invitation to enter, and tripped brisldr in.

.

",Morning coffee and biscuits, Mr. Abernethe. I do hope

you re feeling brighter to-day. Such a lovely day."

Timothy grunted and said suspiciously:

"Is there skim on that milk ?"

"Oh no, Mr. Abernethie. I took it off very carefully, and anyway I've brought up the little strainer in case it should



form again. Some people like it, you know, they say it's the cream--and so it is really."

"Idiotsl" said Timothy. "What kind of biscuits are those ?"

"They're those nice digestive biscuits."

"Digestive tripe. Ginger-nuts are the only biscuits worth eating."

"I'm afraid the grocer hadn't got any this week. But these are really very nice. You try them and see."

"I know what they're like, thank you. Leave those curtains alone, can't you ?"

"I thought you might like a little sunshine. It's such a nice sunny day."

"I want the room kept dark. My head's terrible. It's this paint. I've always been sensitive to paint. It's poisoning

Miss Gilchrist sniffed experimentally and said brightly:

"One really can't smell it nmch in here. The workmen are

over on the other side."

"You're not sensitive like I am. Must I have all the books

I'm reading taken out of my reach ?"

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Abernethie, I didn't know you were

reading all of them."

"Where's my wife ? I haven't seen her for over an hour." "Mrs. Abernethie's resting on the sofa." "Tell her to come and rest up here."

"I'll tell her, Mr. Abernethie. But she may have dropped

off to sleep. Shall we say in about a quarter of an hour ?"

"No, tell her I want her now. Don't monkey about with

that rug. It's arranged the way I like it."

"'I'm so sorry. I thought it was slipping off the far

side."

"I like it slipping off. Go and get Maude. I want her."

Miss Gilchrist departed downstairs and tiptoed into the

drawing-room where Maude Abernethie was sitting with her

leg up reading a novel.

"I'm so sorry, Mrs. Abernethie," she said apologetically. "Mr. Abernethie is asking for you."

Maude thrust aside her novel with a guilt,y, expression. "Oh dear," she said, "I'll go up at once.

She reached for her stick.

Timothy burst out as soon as his wife entered the room:

"So there you are at last I"

"I'm so sorry, dear, I didn't know you wanted me."

"That woman you've got into the house will drive me mad.



Twittering and fluttering round like a demented hen. Real

typical old maid, that's what she is."

"I'm sorry she annoys you. She tries to be kind, that's all." "I don't want anybody kind. I don't want a blasted old

maid al,ways chirruping over me.

She's so damned arch,

too

"Just a little, perhaps."

"Treats me as though I was a confounded kid! It's

maddening."

"I'm sure it must be. But please, please, Timothy, do try

not to be rude to her. I'm really very helpless still and

you yourself say she cooks well."

"Her cooking's all right," Mr. Abernethie admitted

grudgingly. "Yes, she's a decent enough cook. But keep her

in the kitchen, that's all I ask. Don't let her come fussing

round me."

"No, dear, of course not. How are you feeling ?"

"Not at all well. I think you'd better send for Barton to

come and have a look at me. This paint affects my heart.

Feel my pulse--the irregular way it's beating."

Maude felt it without comment.

"Timothy, shall we go to an hotel until the house painting is finished ?"

"It would be a great waste of money."

"Does that matter so much now ?"

"You're just like all women--hopelessly extravagant I Just because we've come into a ridiculously small part of my brother's estate, you think we can go and live indefinitely at the Ritz."

"I didn't quite say that, dear."

"I can tell you that the difference Richard's money will make will be hardly appreciable. This bloodsucking Government will see to that. You mark my words, the whole lot will go in taxation."

Mrs. Abernethie shook her head sadly.

"Ti is coffee's cold," said the invalid, looking with distaste at the cup which he had not as yet tasted. "Why can't I ever get a cup of really hot coffee ?"

"I'll take it down and warm it up."

In the kitchen Miss Gilchrist was drinking tea and conversing affably, though with slight condescension, with Mrs. Jones.

"I'm so anxious to spare Mrs. Abernethie all I can," she said. "All this running up and down stairs is so painful for her."

"Waits on him hand and foot, she does," said Mrs. Jones, stirring the sugar in her cup.

"It's very sad his being such an invalid."

"Not such an invalid either," Mrs. Jones said darkly.
"Suits him very well to lie up and ring bells and have trays brought up and down. But he's well able to get up and go about. Even seen him out in the village, I have, when she's been away. Walking as hearty as you please. Anything he really needs--like his tobacco or a stamp--he can come and get. And that's why when shwas off at that funeral and got held up on the way back, and h told me I'd got to come in and stay the night again, I refused. ' I'm sorry, sir,' I said, ' but I've got my husband to think of. Going out to oblige in the mornings is all very well, but I've got to be there to see to him when he comes back from work.' Nor I wouldn't budge, I wouldn't. Do him good, I thought, to get about the house and look after himself for once. Might make him see what a lot he gets done for him. So I stood firm, I did. He didn't half create."

Mrs. Jones drew a deep breath and took a long satisfying drink of sweet inky tea. "Ar," she said.

Though deeply suspicious of Miss Gilchrist, and considering her as a finicky thing and a "regular fussy old maid," Mrs. Jones approved of the lavish way in which Miss Gilchrist

dispensed her employer's tea and sugar ration.

She set down the cup and said affably:

"I'll give the kitchen floor a nice scrub down and then I'll be getting along. The potatoes is all ready peeled, dear, you'll find them by the sink."

Though slightly affronted by the "dear," Miss Gilchrist was appreciative of the goodwill which had divested an enormous quantity oi potatoes of their outer coverings.

Before she could say anything the telephone rang and she hurried out in the hall to answer it. The telephone, in the style of fifty odd years ago, was situated inconveniently in a draughty passage behind the staircase.

Maude Abernethie appeared at the top of the stairs while Miss Gilchrist was still speaking. The latter looked up and

said:

"It's Mrs.--Leo--is it ?--Abernethie speaking."

"Tell her I'm just coming."

Maude descended the stairs slowly and painfully.

Miss Gilchrist murmured, "I'm so sorry you've had to come down again, Mrs. Abernethie. Has Mr. Abernethie finished his elevenses ? I'll just nip up and get the tray."



She trotted up the stairs as Mrs. Abernethie said into the receiver.

"Helen ? This is Maude here."

The invalid received Miss Gilchrist with a baleful glare. As she picked up the tray he asked fretfully:

"Who's that on the telephone ?"

"Mrs. Leo Abernethie."

"Oh ? Suppose they'll go gossiping for about an hour.

Women have no sense of time when they get on the phone.

Never think of the money they're wasting."

Miss Gilchrist said brightly that it would be Mrs. Leo who

had to pay, and Timothy grunted.

"Just pull that curtain aside, will you ? No, not that one,

the other one. I don't want the liglt slap in my eyes. That's

better. No reason because I'm an invalid that I should have

to sit in the dark all day."

He went on:

"And you might look in that bookcase over there for a

green

What's the matter now ? What are you rushing

off for ?"

"It's the front door, Mr. Abernethie."

"I didn't hear anything. Ymfve got that woman down-stairs,

haven't you ? Let her go and answer it."

"Yes, Mr. Abernethie. What was the book you wanted me

to find ?"

The invalid closed his eyes.

"I can't remember now. You've put it out of my head.

You'd better go."

Miss Gilchrist seized the tray and hurriedly departed.

Putting the tray on the pantry table she hurried into the

front hall, passing Mrs. Abernethie who was still at the tele-phone.

She returned in a moment to ask in a muted voice:

"I'm so sorry to interrupt. It's a nun. Collecting. The

Heart of Mary Fund, I think she said. She has a book. Half

a crown or five shillings most people seem to have given."
Maude Abernethie said:

"Just a moment, Helen," into the telephone, and to Miss Gilchrist, "I don't subscribe to Roman Catholics. We have our own Church charities."

Miss Gilchrist hurried away again.

Maude terminated her conversation after a few minutes with the phrase, "I'll talk to Timothy about it."

She replaced the receiver and came into the front hall. Miss Gilchrist was standing quite still by the drawing-room

door. She was frowning in a puzzled way and jumped when

Maude Abernethie spoke to her.

"There's nothing the matter, is there, Miss Gilchrist ?"

"Oh no, Mrs. Abernethie, I'm afraid I was just wool

gathering. So stupid of me when there's so much to be done."

Miss Gilchrist resumed her imitation of a busy ant and

Maude Abernethie climbed the stairs slowly and painfully to

her husband's room.

"That was Helen on the telephone. It seems that the place

is definitely sold some Institution for Foreign Refugees----"

She paused whilst Timothy expressed himself forcefully on

the subject of Foreign Refugees, with side issues as to the house

in which he had been born and brought up. "No decent

standards left in this country. My old home I I can hardly

bear to think of it."

Maude went on.

"Helen quite appreciates what you--we--will feel about

it. She suggests that we might like to come there for a visit before it goes. She was very distressed about your health and the way the painting is affecting it. She thought you might prefer coming to Enderby to going to an hotel. The servants are there still, so you could be looked after comfortably."

Timothy, whose mouth had been open in outraged protests half-way through this, had closed it again. His eyes had become suddenly shrewd. He now nodded his head approv ingly.

"Thoughtful of Helen," he said. "Very thoughtful. I don't know, I'm sure, I'll have to think it over There's no doubt that this paint is poisoning me--there's arsenic in paint, I believe. I seem to have heard something of the kind. On the other hand the exertion of moving might be too much for me. It's difficult to know what would be the best."

"Perhaps you'd prefer an hotel, dear," said Maude. "A good

hotel is very expensive, but where your health is concerned

"

Timothy

interrupted.

"I wish I could make you understand, Maude, that we ar not

millionaires. Why go to an hotel when Helen has very kindly

suggested that we should go to Enderby ? Not that it's

really for her to suggest I The house isn't hers. I don't understand

legal subtleties, but I presume it belongs to us equally

until it's sold and the proceeds divided. Foreign

'

Refugeesl

It would have made old Cornelius turn in his grave. Yes," he sighed, "I should like to see the old place again

before I die."

12 4

Maude played her last card adroitly.

"I understand that Mr. Entwhistle has suggested that the

members of the family might like to choose certain pieces of

furniture or china or something--before the contents are put

up for auction."

Timothy heaved himself briskly upright.

"We must certainly go. There must be a very exact valuation of what is chosen by each person. Those men the girls have married--I wouldn't trust either of them from what I've heard. There might be some sharp practice. Helen is far too amiable. As the head of the family, it is my duty to be present 1"

He got up and walked up and down the room with a brisk vigorous tread.

"Yes, it is an excellent plan. Write to Helen and accept. What I am really thinking about is you, my dear. It will be a nice rest and change for you. You have been doing far too much lately. The decorators can get on with the painting while we are away and that Gillespie woman can stay here and look after the house."

"Gilchrist," said Maude.

Timothy waved a hand and said that it was all the same.

"I can't do it," said Miss Gilchrist.

Maude looked at her in surprise.

Miss Gilchrist was trembling. Her eyes looked pleadingly into Maude's.

"It's stupid of me, I know... But I simply can't. Not stay here all alone in the house. If there was anyone who could come and--and sleep here too ?"

She looked hopefully at the other woman, but Maude shook her head. Maude Abernethie knew only too well how difficult it was to get anyone in the neighbourhood to "live in."

Miss Gilchrist went on, a kind of desperation in her voice. "I know you'll think.it nervy and foolish--and I wouldn't have dreamed once that I'd ever feel like this. I've never been a nervous woman--or fanciful. But now it all seems different. I'd be terrified--yes, literally terrified--to be all alone here."

"Of course," said Maude. "It's stupid of me. After what happened at Lytchett St. Mary."

"I suppose that's it... It's not logical, I know. And I

didn't feel it at first. I didn't mind being alone in the cottage after--after it had happened· The feeling's grown up gradu-ally. You'll have no opinion of me at all, Mrs. Abernethie, but even since I've been here I've been feeling it--frightened, you know. Not of anything in particular--but just frightened. ·.. It's so silly and I really am ashamed. It's just as though all the time I was expecting something awful to happen... Even that nun comin,g, to the door startled me. Oh dear, I am in a bad way...

"I suppose it's what they call delayed shock," said Maude va,,gely.

Is it ? I don't know. Oh dear, I'm so sorry to appear so--so ungrateful, and after all your kindness. What you will

Maude soothed her.

"We must think of some other arrangement," she said.

## CHAPTER XVI

GEORGE CROSSFIELD paused irresolutely for a moment as he watched a particular feminine back disappear through a doorway. Then he nodded to himself and went in pursuit.

The doorway in question was that of a double-fronted shop --a shop that had gone out of business. The plate-glass windows showed a disconcerting emptiness within. The door was closed, but George rapped on it. A vacuous faced young man with spectacles opened it and stared at George.

"Excuse me," said George. "But I think my cousin just came in here."

The young man drew back and George walked in.
"Hallo, Susan," he said.

Susan, who was standing on a packing-case and using a foot-rule, turned her head in some surprise.

"Hallo, George. Where did you spring from ?"

"I saw your back. I was sure it was yours."

"How clever of you. I suppose backs are distinctive."

"Much more so than faces. Add a beard and pads in your cheeks and do a few things to your hair and nobody will know you when you come face to face with them--but beware of the moment when you walk away."

"I'll remember. Ca-n you remember seven feet five inches until I've got time to write it down."

"Certainly. What is this, book shelves ? '°



"No, cubicle space. Eight feet nine--and three seven..." The young man with the spectacles who had been' fidgeting from one foot to the other, coughed apologetically.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Banks, but if you want to be here for some time "

"I do, rather," said Susan. "If you leave the keys, I'll lock the door and return them to the office when I go past. Will that be all right ?"

"Yes, thank y,,ou. If it weren't that we're short staffed

this morning

Susan accepted the apologetic intent of the half-finished sentence and the young man removed himself to the outer world of the street.

"I'm glad we've got rid of him," said Susan. "House agents are a bother. They will keep talking just when I want to do sums."

"Ah," said George. "Murder in an empty shop. How exciting it would be for the passers-by to see the dead body of a beautiful young woman displayed behind plate glass. How they would goggle. Like goldfish."

"There wouldn't be any reason for you to murder me, George."

"Well, I should get a fourth part of your share of our esteemed uncle's estate. If one were sufficiently fond of money that should be a reason."

Susan stopped taking measurements and turned to look at him. Her eyes opened a little.

"You look a different person, George.

It's really--

extraordinary."

"Different ? How different ?"

"Like an advertisement. This is the same man that you sau overleaf, but now he has taken Uppington's Health Salts."

She sat down on another packing-case and lit a cigarette.

"You must have wanted your share of old Richard's money pretty badly, George ?"

"Nobod,y, could honestly say that money isn't welcome these days.

George's tone was light.

Susan said: "You were in a jam, weren't you ?"

"Hardly your business, is it, Susan ?"

"I was just interested."

"Are you renting this shop as0,a place of business ?"

"I'm buying the whole house.

"With possession ?"

"Yes. The two upper floors were flats. One's empty and



went with the shop. The other I'm buying the people out."

"Nice to have money, isn't it, Susan ?"

There was a malicious tone in George's voice. But Susan merely took a deep breath and said:

"As far as I'm concerned, it's wonderful. An answer to prayer."

"Does prayer kill off elderly relatives ?"

Susan paid no attention.

"This place is exactly right. To begin with, it's a very good piece of period architecture. I can make the living part upstairs something quite unique. There are two lovely moulded ceilings and the rooms are a beautiful shape. This

part down here which has already been hacked about I shall have completely modern."

"What is this ? A dress business ?"

"No. Beauty culture.
Herbal preparations. Face

creams I"

"The full racket ?"

"The racket as before. It pays. It always pays. What you need to put it over is personality. I can do it."

George looked at his cousin appreciatively, lie admired the slanting planes of her face, the generous mouth, the radiant colouring. Altogether an unusual and vivid face. And he recognised in Susan that odd, indefinable quality, the quality of success.

"Yes," he said, "I think you've got what it takes, Susan. You'll get back your outlay on this scheme and you'll get places with it."

"It's the fight neighbourhood, just off main shopping

street and you can park a car fight in front of the door."
Again George nodded.

"Yes, Susan, you're going to succeed. Have you had this

in mind for a long time ?"

"Over a year ?"

"Why didn't you put it up to old Richard ? He might

have staked you

?--

"I did put it up to him."

"And he didn't see his way ? I wonder why. I should have
thought he'd have recognised the same mettle that he himself
was made of."

Susan did not answer, and into George's mind there leapt
a swift bird's eye view of another figure. A thin, nervous,
suspicious-eyed young man.

"Where does--what's his name---Greg--come in on all



this ?" he asked. "He'll give up dishing out pills nd powders, I take it ?"

"Of course. There will be a laboratory built out at the back. We shall have our own formulas for face creams and beauty preparations."

George suppressed a grin. He wanted to say: "So baby is to have his play pen," but he did not say it. As a cousin he did not mind being spiteful, but he had an uneasy sense that Susan's feeling for her husband was a thing to be treated with care. It had all the qualities of a dangerous explosive. He wondered, as he had wondered on the day of the funeral, about that queer fish, Gregory. Something odd about the fellow. So nondescript in appearance--and yet, in some way, not nondescript...

He looked again at Susan, calmly and radiantly triumphant.

"You've got the true Abernethie touch," he sid. "The only one of the family who has. Pity as far as old Richard was concerned that you're a woman. If you'd been a boy, I bet he'd have left you the whole caboodle."

Susan said slowly: "Yes, I think he would."

She paused and then went on:

"He didn't like Greg, you know..."

"Ah." George raised his eyebrows. "His mistake." "Yes."

"Oh, well. An,,yvay, things are going well now--all going according to plan. '

As he said the words he was struck by the fact that they seemed particularly applicable to Susan.

The idea made him, just for a moment, a shade uncomfortable.

He didn't really like a woman who was so cold-bloodedly efficient.

Changing the subject he said:

"By the way, did you get a letter from Helen ? About Enderby ?"

"Yes, I did. This morning. Did you ?"

"Yes. What are you going to do about it ?"

"Greg and I thought of going up the week-end after next --if that suits everyone else.

Helen seemed to want us all together."

George laughed shrewdly.

"Or somebody might choose a more valuable piece of furniture than somebody else ?"

Susan laughed.

"Oh, I suppose there is a proper valuation. But a valuaA.T.F. I29 E

tion for probate will be much lower than the things would be in the open market. And besides, I'd quite like to have a

few relics of the founder of the family fortunes. Then I think

it would be amusing to have one or two really absurd and

charming specimens of the Victorian age in this place. Make

a kind of thing of them! That period's coming in now.

There was a green malachite table in the drawing-room.

You could build quite a colour scheme around it. And perhaps

a case of stuffed humming birds---or one of those crowns

made of waxed flowers. Something like that--just as a

key-note--can be very effective." "I trust your judgment." "You'll be there, I suppose ?"

"Oh, I shall be there--to see fair play if nothing else."

Susan laughed.

"What do you bet there will be a grand family row ? "she asked.

"Rosamund will probably want your green malachite table

for a stage set I"

Susan did not laugh. Instead she frowned.

"Have you seen Rosamund lately ?"

"I have not seen beautiful Cousin Rosamund since we all

came back third-class from the funeral."

"I've seen her once or twice... She--she seemed rather

odd--"

"What was the matter with her ? Trying to think ?" "No. She seemed---well--upset."

"Upset about coming into a lot of money and being able to

put on some perfectly frightful play in which Michael can make an ass of himself ?"

"Oh, that's going ahead and it does sound frightful--but all the same, it may be a success. Michael's good, you know. He can put himself across the footlights--or whatever the term is. He's not like Rosamund, who's just beautiful and ham."

"Poor beautiful ham Rosamund."

"All the same Rosamund is not quite so dumb as one might think. She says things that are quite shrewd, sometimes. Things that you wouldn't have imagined she'd even noticed. It's--it's quite disconcerting."

"Quite like our Aunt Cora "

"Yes..."

A momentary uneasiness descended on them both--conjured up it seemed, by the mention of Cora Lansquenet.

Then George said with a rather elaborate air of unconcern:



"Talking of Cora--what about that companion woman of hers ? I rather think something ought to be done about her."

"Done about her ? What do you mean ?"

"Well, it's up to the family, so to speak. I mean I've been thinking Cora was our Aunt--and it occurred to me that this woman mayn't find it easy to get another post."

"That occurred to you, did it ?"

"Yes. People are so careful of their skins. I don't say they'd actually think that this Gilchrist female would take a hatchet to them--but at the back of their minds they'd feel that it might be unlucky. People are superstitious."

"How odd that you should have thought of all that, George ? How would you know about things like that ?"

George said dryly:

"You forget that I'm a lawyer. I see a lot of the queer, illogical side of people. What I'm getting at is, that I think

we might do something about the woman, give her a small allowance or something, to tide her over, or find some office post for her if she's capable of that sort of thing. I feel rather as though we ought to keep in touch with her."

"You needn't worry," said Susan. Her voice was dry and ironic. "I've seen to things.

She's gon, to Timothy and Maude."

George looked startled.

"I say, Susan is that wise ?"

"It was the best thing I could think of--at the moment."

George looked at her curiously.

"You're very sure of yourself, aren't you, Susan ? You

know what you're doing and you don't have--regrets."

Susan said lightly:

"It's a waste of time--having regrets."

## CHAPTER XVII

MIC}AL ?ossa,) the letter across the table to Rosamund.

"What about it ?"

"Oh, we'll go. Don't you think so ?"

Michael said slowly:

"It might be as well."

"There might be some jewellery... Of course all the

things in the house are quite hideotm--stuffed birds and wax

flowers--ugh l"

"Yes. Bit of a mausoleum. As a matter of fact I'd like



to make a sketch or two---articulaxly in that drawing-room.

The mantelpiece, for instance, and that very odd shaped couch. They'd be just right for The Baronet's Progress--if we revive it."

He got ap and looked at his watch.

"That reminds me. I must go round and see Rosenheim. Don't expect me until rather late this evening. I'm dining with Oscar and we're going into the question of taking up that option and how it fits in with the American offer."

"Darling Oscar. He'll be pleased to see you after all this time. Give him my love."

Michael looked at her sharply. He no longer smiled and his face had an alert predatory look.

"What do you mean--after all this time ? Anyone would think I hadn't seen him for months."

"Well, you haven't, have you ?" murmured Rosamund.

"Yes, I have. We lunched together only a week ago."

"How funny. He must have forgotten about it. He rang up yesterday and said he hadn't seen you since the first night of Tilly Looks West."

"The old fool must be off his head."

Michael laughed. Rosamund, her eyes wide and blue, oked at him without emotion.

"You think I'm a fool, don't you, Mick ?"

Michael protested.

"Darling, of course I don't."

"Yes, you do. But I'm not an absolute nitwit. You didn't

go near Oscar that day. I know where you did go."

"Rosamund darling--what do you mean ?"

"I mean I know where you really were..."

Michael, his attractive face uncertain, stared at his wife. She stared back at him, placid, unruffled.

How very disconcerting, he suddenly thought, a really empty stare could be.

He said rather unsuccessfully:

"I don't know what you're driving at..."

"I just meant it's rather sill,y, telling me a lot of lies."

"Look here, Rosamund

He had started to bluster--but he stopped, taken aback as his wife said softly:

"We do want to take up this option and put this play on, don't we ?"

"Want to ? It's the part I've always dreamed must exist somewhere."

"Yes--that's what I mean."

"Just what do you mean ?"

"Well--it's worth a good deal, isn't it ? /3ut one mustn't take too many risks."

He stared at her and said slowly:

"It's yo,,ur money--I know that. If yo don't want to risk it"

It's our money, darling." Rosamund tressed it.

think that's rather important."

"Listen, darling.

The part of Eileen-At would bear

writing up."

Rosamund smiled.

I don't think--really--I want to play it. ,

"My dear girl." lichael was aghast. "at s come over

you ? :"

"Nothing."

"Yes, there is, you've been different ltely--m°°dYnervous,

what is it ?"

"Nothing. I only want you to be---careful, „Mick." "Careful about what ? I'm always careful. -. "No,

I don't think you are. You alway thnk you can

get away with things and that everyone will elieve.wha-teve, r,

you want them to. You were stupid about 0car that day.

Michael flushed angrily.

"And what about you ? You said you were going shopping

with Jane. You didn't. Jane's in America, has been for

weeks."

"Yes," said Rosamund. "That was stupirl, too. I really

just went for a walk in Regent's Park."

Michael looked at her curiously.

"Regent's Park ? You never went for a vlk in Regent's

Park in your life. What's it all about ? IJave you got a

boy friend ? You may say what you like, ¢osamund, you have , been different lately. Why ?"

I ye been--thnkng about things. About vh.at. t.o do...

Michael came round the table to her in a satslyng spontaneous
rush. His voice held fervour as he cried:

".Darling--you know I love you madly l" , . .,

She responded satisfactorily to the embrace, our as mey
drew apart he was struck again disagreeably b the odd calculation
in those beautiful eyes.

"Whatever I'd done, you'd always forgive me, wouldn't
you ? "he demanded.

"I suppose so," said Rosamund vaguely. ,, That's not the
point. You see, it's all different now. We,ve got to think
and plan."



"Xlink and plan what ?"

Rosamund, frowning, said:

"Things aren't over when you've done them. It's really
a sort of beginning and then one's got to arrange what to do

next, and what's important and what is n))t."

"Rosamund..."

She sat, her face perplexed, her wide gaze on a middle distance in which Michael, apparently, did not feature.

At the third repetition of her name, she started slightly and came out of her reverie.

"What did you say ?"

"I asked you what you were thinking about..."

"Oh ? Oh yes, I was wondering if I'd go down to--what is it ?--Lytchett St. Mary, and see that Miss Somebody--the

one who was with Aunt Cora."

"But why ?"

"Well, she'll be going away soon, won't she ? To relatives or someone. I don't think we ought to let her go away until we've asked her."

"Asked her what ?"

"Asked her who killed Aunt Cora ?"

Michael stared.

"You mean--you think she knows ?"

Rosamund said rather absently:

"Oh yes, I expect so... She lived there, you see."

"But she'd have told the police."

"Oh, I don't mean she knows that way--I just mean that she's probably quite sure. Because of what Uncle Richard said when he went down there." He did go down there, you know, Susan told me so.

"But she wouldn't have heard what he said."

"Oh yes, she would, darling." Rosamund sounded like someone arguing with an unreasonable child.

"Nonsense, I can hardly see old Richard Abernethie dis-cussing his suspicions of his family before an outsider."

"Well, of course. She'd have heard it through the door."

"Eavesdropping, you mean ?"

"I expect so--in fact I'm sure. It must be so deadly dull

shut up, two women in a cottage and nothing ever happening except washing up and the sink and putting the cat out and things like that. Of course she listened and read letters--anyone would."

Michael looked at her with something faintly approaching dismay.

"Would you ?" he demanded bluntly.



"I wouldn't go and be a companion in the country."

Rosamund shuddered. "I'd rather die."

"I meant--would you read letters and--and all that ?"

Rosamund said calmly:

"If I wanted to know, yes.

Everybody does, don't you

think so ?"

The limpid gaze met his.

"One just wants to know," said Rosamund. "One doesn't

want to do anything about it. I expect that's how shfeels

--Miss Gilchrist, I mean, But I'm certain she knows."

Michael said in a stifled voice:

"Rosamund, who do you think killed Cora ?

And old

Richard ?"

Once again that limpid blue gaze met his.

"Darling--don't be absurd... You know as well as I do.

But it's much, much better never to mention it. So we

won't."

## CHAPTER XVIII

FROM his S-Ar by the fireplace in the library, Hercule Poirot looked at the assembled company.

His eyes passed thoughtfully over Susan, sitting upright, looking vivid and animated, over her husband, sitting near her, his expression rather vacant and his fingers twisting a loop of string; they went on to George Crossfield, debonair and distinctly pleased with himself, talking about card sharpers 'on atlantic cruises to Rosamund, who said mechanically, "How extraordinary, darling. But why ?" in a completely uninterested voice; went on to Michael with his very individual type of haggard ood looks and his very apparent charm; to Helen, poised ad slightly remote; to Timothy, comfortably settled in the best armchair with an extra cushion at his back; and Mande, sturdy and thick-set, in devoted attendance, and finally to the figure sitting with a tinge of apology just beyond the range of the family circle---the figure of Miss Gilchrist wearing a rather peculiar "dressy" blouse. Pre-sently, he judged, she would get up, murmur an excuse and leave the family gathering and go up to her room. Miss Gilchrist, he thought, knew her place. She had learned it the hard way.

Hercule Poirot sipped his after-dinner coffee and between

half-closed lids made his appraisal.

He had wanted them there--all together, and he had got them. And what, he thought to himself, was he going to do with them now ? He felt a sudden weary distaste for going on with the business. Why was that, he wondered ? Was it the influence of Helen Abernethie ? There was a quality of passive resistance about her that seemed unexpectedly strong. Had she, while apparently graceful and unconcerned, managed to impress her own reluctance upon him ? She was averse to this raking up of the details of old Richard's death, he knew that. She wanted it left alone, left to die out into oblivion. Poirot was not surprised by that. What did surprise him was his own disposition to agree with her.

Mr. Entwhistle's account of the family had, he realised, been admirable. He had described all these people shrewdly and well. With the old lawyer's knowledge and appraisal to guide him, Poirot had wanted to see for himself. He had fancied that, meeting these people intimately, he would have a very shrewd idea--not of how and when--(those were questions with which he did not propose to concern himself.

Murder had been possible--that was all he needed to know but of who. For Hercule Poirot had a lifetime of experience behind him, and as a man who deals with pictures can recognise

the artist, so Poirot believed he could recognise a likely type of the amateur criminal who will--if his own particular need arises be prepared to kill.

But it was not to be so easy.

Because he could visualise almost all of those people as a possible--though not a probable--murderer. George might kill--as the cornered rat kills. Susan calmly--efficiently--to further a plan. Gregory because he had that queer morbid streak which discounts and invites, almost craves, punishment. Michael because he was ambitious and had a murderer's cocksure vanity. Rosamund because she was/righteningly simple in outlook. Timothy because he had hated and resented his brother and had craved the power his brother's money would give. Maude because Timothy was her child and where her child was concerned she would be ruthless. Even Miss Gilchrist, he thought, might have contemplated murder if it could have restored to her the Willow Tree in its ladylike glory 1

And Helen ? He could not see Helen as committing murder. She was too civilised--too removed from violence. And she and her husband had surely loved Richard Abernethie.

Poirot sighed to himself. There were to be no short cuts to the truth, Instead he would have to adopt a longer, but a

reasonably sure method. There would have to be conversa tion. Much conversation. For in the long run, either through a lie, or through truth, people were bound to give themselves away ....

He had been introduced by Helen to the gathering, and had set to work to overcome the almost universal annoyance caused by his presence--a foreign stranger !--in this family gathering. He had used his eyes and his ears. He had watched and listened--openly and behind doors! He had noticed affinities, antagonisms, the unguarded words that arose as always when property was to be divided. He had engineered adroitly tte--ttes, walks upon the terrace, and had made his deductions and observations. He had talked with Miss Gilchrist about the vanished glories of her teashop

and about the correct composition of brioches and chocolate

dclairs and had visited the kitchen garden with her to discuss

the proper use of herbs in cooking. He had spent some long

half-hours listening to Timothy talking about his own health

and about the effect upon it of paint.

Paint ? Poirot frowned. Somebody else had said some
thing about paint--Mr. Entwhistle ?

There had also been discussion of a different kind of paint
ing. Pierre Lansquenet as a painter. Cora Lansquenet's

paintings, rapturised over by Miss Gilchrist, dismissed scorn
,fully by Susan. "Just like picture ,postcards," she had said.

' She did them from postcards, too.

Miss Gilchrist had been quite upset by that and had said

sharply that dear Mrs. Lansquenet always painted from

Nature.

"But I bet she cheated," said Susan to Poirot when Miss

Gilchrist had gone out of the room. "In fact I know she

did, though I won't upset the old pussy by saying so."

"And how do you know ?"

Poirot watched the strong confident line of Susan's chin.

"She will always be sure, this one," he, thought.

"And

perhaps sometime, she will be too sure...

Susan was going on.

"I'll tell you, but don't pass it on to the Gilchrist. One picture is of Polflexan, the cove and the lighthouse and the

pier--the usual aspect that all amateur artists sit down and

sketch. But the pier was blown up in the war, and since

Aunt Cora's sketch was done a couple of years ago, it can't very

well be from Nature, can it ? But the postcards they sell

there still show the pier as it used to be. There was one in

her bedroom drawer. So Aunt Cora started her' rough sketch'

down there, I expect, and then finished it surreptitiously later at home from a po,s, tcard I It's funny, isn't it, the way people get caught out ? '

"Yes, it is, as you say, funny." He paused, and then thought that the opening was a good one.

"You do not remember me, Madame," he said, "but I remember you. This is not the first time that I have seen you."

She stared at him. Poirot nodded with great gusto.

"Yes, yes, it is so. I was inside an automobile, well wrapped up and from the window I saw you.. You were talking to one of the mechanics in the garage. You do not

notice me--it is natural I am inside the car--an elderly muffled-up foreigner! But I notice you, for you are young and agreeable to look at and you stand there in the sun. So when I arrive here, I say to myself, ' Tiens I what a coinci dence I '"

"A garage ? Where ? When was this ?"

"Oh, a little time ago---a week--no, more. For the mo ment," said Poirot disingenuously and with a full recollection of the King's Arms garage in his mind, "I cannot remember where. I travel so much all over this country."

"Looking for a suitable house to buy for your refugees ?"

"Yes. There is so much to take into consideration, you see. Priceneighbourhood--suitability for conversion."

"I suppose you'll have to pull the house about a lot ? Lots

of horrible partitions."

"In the bedrooms, yes, certainly. But most of the ground

floor rooms we shall not touch." He paused before going on.

"Does it sadden you, Madame, that this old family mansion

of yours should go this way--to strangers ?"

"Of course not." Susan looked amused. "I think it's an

excellent idea. It's an impossible place for anybody to think

of living in as it is. And I've nothing to be sentimental about.

It's not rny old home. My mother and father lived in Lond,on.

We just came here for Christmas sometimes. Actually Ive

always thought it quite hideous---an almost indecent temple to

wealth."

"The altars are different now. There is the building in,

and the concealed lighting and the expensive simplicity. But

wealth still has its temples, Madame. I understand--I am not,

I hope, indiscreet--that you yourself are planning such an

.

ed"

edifice ? Everything d lxwand no expense spar .

Susan laughed.

"Hardly a temple--it's just a place of business."

$8

"Perhaps the name does not matter But

it will cost

much

money--that is true, is it not ?"

"Everything's

wickedly expensive nowadays. But the

initial

outlay will be worth while, I think."

"Tell me something about these plans of yours. It amazes me to find a beautiful young woman so practical, so com petent. In my young days--a long time ago, I admit--beautiful women thought only of their pleasures, of cosmetics, of la toilette."

"Women still think a great deal about their faces--that's where I come in."

"Tell me."

And she had told him. Told him with a wealth of detail and with a great deal of unconscious self-revelation. He appreciated her business acumen, her boldness of planning and her grasp of detail. A good bold planner, sweeping all side issues away. Perhaps a little ruthless as all those who plan boldly must be ....

Watching

her, he had said:

"Yes, you

will succeed. You will go ahead. How fortunate

that you

are not restricted, as so many are, by poverty. One

cannot go

far without the capital outlay. To have had these

creative ideas

and to have been frustrated by lack of means--

that would

have been unbearable."

"I couldn't

have borne it! But I'd have raised money

somehow or

other--got someone to back me."

"Ahl of

course. Your uncle, whose house this was, was

rich. Even

if he had not died, he would, as you express it,

have '

staked' you."

"Oh no,

he wouldn't. Uncle Richard was a bit of a stickin-the-mud

where

women were concerned. If I'd been a

man "A quick flash of anger swept across her face. "He

made me

very angry."

"I see--yes,

I see..."

"The old

shouldn't stand in the way of the young. I---oh,

I beg

your pardon." '

Hercule

Poirot

laughed easily and twirled his moustache.

"I am

old, yes. But I do not impede youth. There is no

one who

needs to wait for my death."

"What a

horrid idea."

"But you

are a realist, Madame. Let us admit without more ado

that the world is full of the young--or even the middle-aged--who wait,

patiently or impatiently, for the death of

someone whose decease will give them if not affluence --then opportunity."

"Opportunity I "Susan said, taking a deep breath. "That's

what one needs."

Poirot who had been looking beyond her, said gaily:

"And here is your husband come to join our little discussion We talk, Mr. Banks, of opportunity. Opportunity the golden---opportunity, who must. be grasped with both hands. How far in conscxence can one go ? Let us hear your views ?"

But he was not destined to hear the views of Gregory Banks on opportunity or .on anything else. In fact he had found it next to impossible to talk to Gregory Banks at all. Banks had a curious fluid quality. Whether by his own wish, or by that of his wife, he seemed to have no liking for t te-h-ttes or quiet discussions. No, "conversation" with Gregory had failed.

Poirot had talked with Maude Abernethie--also about paint (the smell of) and how fortunate it had been

that Timothy had been able to come to Enderby, and how kind it
had been of Helen to extend a.n invitation to Miss
Gilchrist also.
"For really she is most useful. Timothy so
often feels like a snack--and one cannot ask too much of
other people's servants but there is a gas ring in a little room off
the pantry, so that Miss Gilchrist can warm up Ovaltine or
Benger's there without disturbing, anybody. And she's so
willing about fetching things, she s quite willing to run up and
down stairs a dozen times a day. Oh yes, I feel that it was
really quite Providential that she should have lost her nerve
about staying alone in the house as she did, though I admit it vexed
me at
the time."
"Lost her nerve ?" Poirot
was interested.
He listened whilst Mande gave him an account
of l
[iss Gilchrist's sudden collapse.
"She was frightened, you say ? And yet
could ,n, of exactly
say why ? That
is interesting. Very interesting.' "I put it down
myself
to delayed shock." "Perhaps."
"Once, during the war, when a bomb

dropped about a mile away from

us, I remember Timothy"

Poirot abstracted his mind from Timothy.

"Had anything p,,ar[.icular

happened that day ? "he asked. "On what day ? Maude looked blank. "The day that Miss Gilchrist was upset."

"Oh, that--no, I don't think so.

It seems to have been coming on ever since she left Lychett

St. Mary, or so she said. She didn't seem to

mind

when

she

was

there."

x4o

And the result, Poirot thought, had been a piece of poisoned

wedding cake. Not so very surprising that Miss Gilchrist was

frightened after that And

even when she had removed

herself

to the peaceful country round Stansfield Grange, the fear

had lingered. More than lingered. Grown. Why grown

? Surely attending on an exacting hypochondriac like Timothy must be so exhausting that nervous fears would be likely to be swallowed up in exasperation ?

But something in that house had made Miss Gilchrist afraid. What ? Did she know herself ?

Finding himself alone with Miss Gilchrist for a brief space before dinner, Poirot had sailed into the subject with an exaggerated foreign curiosity.

"Impossible, you comprehend, for me to mention the matter of murder to members of the family. But I am intrigued. Who would not be ? A brutal crime--a sensitive artist attacked in a lonely cottage. Terrible for her family. But terrible, also, I imagine, for you. Since Mrs. Timothy Abernethie gives me to understand that you were there at the time ?"

"Yes, I was. And if you'll excuse me, M. Pontarlier, I don't want to talk about it."

"I understand---oh yes, I completely understand."

Itaving said this, Poirot waited. And, as he had thought, Miss

Gilchrist immediately did begin to talk about it.

He

heard nothing from her that he had not heard before, but

he played his part with perfect sympathy, uttering little cries

of comprehension and listening with an absorbed interest which

Miss Gilchrist could not but help enjoy.

Not

until she had exhausted the subject of what she herself had

felt, and what the doctor had said, and how kind Mr. Entwhistle

had been, did Poirot proceed cautiously to the next

point.

"You

were wise, I think, not to remain alone down in that cottage."

"I

couldn't have done it, M. Pontarlier. I really couldn't have

done it."

"No.

I understand even that you were afraid to remain alone

in the house of Mr. Timothy Abernethie whilst they came here

?"

Miss

Gilchrist looked guilty.

'

I'm terribly ashamed about that. So foolish really. It

was just a kind of panic I had--I really don't know

"But of course one knows why. You had just recovered from a dastardly attempt to poison you "

x4x

Miss Gilchrist here sighed and said she simply couldn't understand it. Why should anyone try to poison her ?

"But obviously, my dear lady, because this criminal, this assassin, thought that you knew something that might lead to his apprehension by the police."

"But what could I know ? Some dreadful tramp, or semi-crazed creature."

"If it was a tramp. It seems to me unlikely"

"Oh, please, M. Pontarlier--" Miss Gilchrist became suddenly very upset.

"Don't suggest such things. I don't want to believe it."

"You do not want to believe what ?"

"I don't want to believe that it wasn't--I mean--that it was.-

She paused, confused.

"And yet," said Poirot shrewdly, "you do believe."

"Oh, I don't. I don't I"

"But I think you do. That is why you are frightened...
You are still frightened, are you not ?"

"Oh, no, not since I came here. So many people. And such a nice family atmosphere. Oh, no, everything seems quite all right here."

"It seems to me--you must excuse my interest--I am an old man, somewhat infirm and a great part of my time is given to idle speculation on matters which interest me---it seems to me that there must have been some definite occurrence at Stansfield Grange which, so to speak, brought your fears to a head. Doctors recognise nowadays how much takes place in our subconscious."

"Yes, yes--I know they say so."

"And I think your subconscious fears might have been brought to a point by some small concrete happening, something, perhaps, quite extraneous, serving, shall we say, as a focal point."

Miss Gilchrist seemed to lap this up eagerly.

"I'm sure you are right," she said.

"Now what, should you think, was this--er---extraneous circumstance ?"

Miss Gilchrist pondered a moment, and then said, unexpectedly:

"I think, you know, M. Pontarlier, it was the nun."

Before Poirot could take this up, Susan and her husband came in, closely followed by Helen.

"A nun," thought Poirot... "Now where, in all this,

have I heard something about a nun ?"



lie resolved to lead the conversation on to nuns sometime in the course of the evening.

CHAPTER XIX

THE FAm-¥ had all been polite to M. Pontarlier, the representative of U.N.A.R.C.O. And how right he had been to have chosen to designate himself by initials. Everyone had accepted U.N.A.R.C.O. as a matter of course--had even pretended to know all about it I How averse human beings were ever to admit ignorance! An exception had been Rosamund, who had asked him wonderingly: "But what is it ? I never heard of it ?" Fortunately no one else had been there at the time. Poirot had explained the organisation in such a way that anyone but Rosamund would have felt abashed at having displayed ignorance of such a well-known, world-wide institution. Rosamund, however, had only said vaguely, "Oh! refugees all over again. I'm so tired of refugees." Thus voicing the unspoken reaction of many, who were usually too conventional to express themselves so frankly.

M. Pontarlier was, therefore, now accepted--as a nuisance

but also as a nonentity. He had become, as it were, a piece of foreign ddcor. The general opinion was that Helen should have avoided having him here this particular week-end, but as he was here they must make the best of it. Fortunately this queer little foreigner did not seem to know much English. Quite often he did not understand what you said to him, and when everyone was speaking more or less at once he seemed completely at sea. He appeared to be interested only in refugees and post-war conditions, and his vocabulary only included those subjects. Ordinary chit-chat appeared to bewilder him. More or less forgotten by all, Hercule Poirot leant back in his chair, sipped his coffee and observed, as a cat may observe, the twitterings, and comings and goings of a flock of birds. The cat is not ready yet to make its spring.

After twenty-four hours of prowling round the house and examining its contents, the heirs of Richard Abernethie were ready to state their preferences, and, if need be, to fight for them.

The subject of conversation was, first, a certain Spode dinner dessert service off which they had just been eating dessert.

"I don't suppose I have long to live," said Timothy in a

faint melancholy voice. "And Maude and I have no children. It is hardly worth while our burdening ourselves with useless possessions. But for sentiment's sake I should like to have the old dessert service. I remember it in the dear old days. It's out of fashion, of course, and I understand dessert services have very little value nowadays--but there it is. I shall be quite content with that--and perhaps the Boule Cabinet in the White Boudoir."

"You're too late, Uncle," George spoke with debonair insouciance. "I asked Helen to mark off the Spode service to me this morning."

Timothy became purple in the face.

"Mark it off mark it off ? What do you mean ? Nothing's been settled yet. And what do you want with a dessert service. You're not married."

"As a matter of fact I collect Spode. And this is really a splendid specimen. But it's quite all right about the Boule

Cabinet, Uncle. I wouldn't have that as a gift."

Timothy waved aside the Boule Cabinet.

"Now look here, young George. You can't go butting in, in this way. I'm an older man than you are--and I'm Richard's only surviving brother. That dessert service is

"Why not take the Dresden service, Uncle ? A very fine example and I'm sure just as full of sentimental memories. Anyway, the Spode's mine. First come, first served."

"Nonsense--nothing of the kind I" Timothy spluttered. Mande said sharply:

"Please don't upset your uncle, George. It's very bad for him. Naturally he will take the Spode if he wants to I The first choice is his, and you young people must come afterwards. He was Richard's brother, as he says, and you are only a nephew."

"And I can tell you this, young man." Timothy was seething with fury. "If Richard had made a proper will, the disposal of the contents of this place would have been entirely in my hands. That's the way the property should have been left, and if it wasn't, I can only suspect undue influence. Yes

--and I repeat it---ndue influence."

Timothy glared at his nephew.

"A preposterous will," he said. "Preposterous I"

He leant back, placed a hand to his heart, and groaned:

"This is very bad for me. If I could have--a little brandy."

Miss Gflchrist hurried to get it and returned with the restorative in a small glass.



"Here you are, Mr. Abernetkie. Please--please don't ex,cite yo, urself. Are you sure you oughtn't to go up to be,d, ?"

Don t be a fool." Timothy swallowed the brandy. Go to bed ? I intend to protect my interests."

"Really, George, I'm surprised at you," said Maude. "What your uncle says is perfectly true. His wishes come first. If he wants the Spode dessert service he shall have it I"

"It s qmte hdeous anyway, sad Susan.

"Hold your tongue, Susan," said Timothy.

The thin young man who sat beside Susan raised his head.

In a voice that was a little shriller than his ordinary tones,

he said:

"Don't speak like that to my wife I °'

He half rose from his seat.

Susan said quickly: "It's all right, Greg. I don't mind."

"But I do."

Helen said: "I think it would be graceful on,your part,

George, to let your uncle have the dessert service.

Timothy,, spluttered indignantly: "' There's no 'letting'

about it 1

But George, with a slight bow to Helen said, "Your wish

is law, Aunt Helen. I abandon my claim."

"You didn't really want it, anyway, did you ? "said Helen.

He cast a sharp glance at her, then grinned:

"The trouble with you, Aunt Helen, is that you're too sharp

by half! You see more than you're meant to see. Don't

worry, Uncle Timothy, the Spode is yours. Just my idea

of fun."

"Fun, indeed." Maude Abernethie was indignant. "Your

uncle might have had a heart attack I"

"Don't you believe it," said George cheerfully. "Uncle

Timothy will probably outlive us all. He's what is known as

a creaking gate."

Timothy leaned forward balefully.

"I don't wonder," he said," that Richard was disappointed

in you."

"Wat's that ?" The good humour went out of George's

face.

"You came up here after Mortimer died, expecting to step

into his shoes--expecting that Richard would make you his

heir, didn't you ? But my poor brother soon took your measure. He knew where the money would go if you had

control of it. I'm surprised that he even left you a part of

his fortune. He knew where it would go. Horses, Gambling,



Monte Carlo, foreign Casinos. P,.erhaps worse. He suspected

you of not being straight, didn t he ?" ·

George, a white dint appearing each side of his nose, said

quietly:

"Hadn't you better be careful of what you are saying ?"

"I wasn't well enough to come here for the funeral," said

Timothy slowly, "but Maude told me what Cora said. Cora

always was a fool--but there may have been something in it

And if so, I know who I'd suspect"

"Timothy!" Mande stood up, solid, calm, a tower of

forcefulness. "You have had a very trying evening. You

must consider your health. I can't have you getting ill again.

Come up with me. You must take a sedative and go straight

to bed. Timothy and I, Helen, will take the Spode dessert

service and the Boule Cabinet as momentoes of Richard. There

is no objection to that, I hope ?"

Her glance swept round the company. Nobody spoke, and she marched out of the room supporting Timothy with a hand under his elbow, waving aside Miss Gilchrist who was hovering half-heartedly by the door.

George broke the silence after they had departed.

"Femme formidable I" he said. "That describes Aunt Maude exactly. I should hate ever to impede her triumphal progress."

Miss Gilchrist sat down again rather uncomfortably and murmured:

"Mrs. Abernethie is always so kind."

The remark fell rather flat.

Michael Shane laughed suddenly and said: "You know, I'm enjoying all this 1 ' The Voysey Inheritance ' to the life. By the way, Rosamund and I want that malachite table in the drawing-room."

"Oh, no," cried Susan. "I wnt that."

"Here we go again," said George, raising his eyes to the ceiling.

"Well, we' needn't get angry about it," said Susan. "The reason I want it is for my new Beauty shop. Just a note of colour--and I shall put a great bouquet of wax flowers on it. It would look wonderful. I can find wax flowers easily enough, but a green malachite table isn't so common."

"But, darling," said Rosamund, "that's just why we want

it. For the new set. As you say, a note of colour--and so absolutely period. And either wax flowers or stuffed humming birds. It will be absolutely right."

"I see what you mean, Rosamund," said Susan. "But

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I don't think you've got as good a case as I have. You could easily have a painted malachite table for the stage--it would look just the same. But for my salon I've got to have the genuine thing."

"Now, ladies," said George. "What about a sporting decision ? Why not toss for it ? Or cut the cards ? All quite

in keeping with the period of the table."

Susan smiled pleasantly.

"Rosamund and I will talk about it to-morrow," she said.

She seemed, as usual, quite sure of herself. George looked with some interest from her face to that of Rosamund. Rosamund's face had a vague, rather far-away expression.

"Which one will you back, Aunt Helen ? "he asked. "An even money chance, I'd say. Susan has determination, but Rosamund is so wonderfully single-minded."

"Or perhaps not humming birds," said Rosamund. "One of those big Chinese vases would make a lovely lamp, with a gold shade."

. Miss Gilchrist hurried into placating speech.

"This house is full of so many beautiful things," she said. "That green table would look wonderful in your new estab-lishment, I'm sure, Mrs. Banks. I've never seen one like it. It must be worth a lot of money."

"It will be deducted from my share of the estate, of course," said Susan.

"I'm so sorrymI didn't mean °' Miss Gilchrst was covered with confusion.

"It may be deducted from our share of the estate," Michael pointed out. "With the wax flowers thrown in."

"They look so right on that table," Miss Gilchrist mur-mured.

"Really artistic. Sweetly pretty."

But nobody was paying any attention to Miss Gilchrist'8 well-meant trivialities.

Greg said, speaking again in that high nervous voice:
"Susan wants that table."

There was a momentary stir of unease, as though, by his words, Greg had set a different musical key.

Helen said quickly:

"And what do you really want, George ? Leaving out the Spode service."

George grinned and the tension relaxed.

"Rather a shame to bait old Timothy," he said. "But he really is quite unbelievable. He's had his own way in every-thing so iong that he's become quite pathological about it."

"You have to humour an invalid, Mr. Crossfield," said Miss Gilchrist.

"Ruddy old hypochondriac, that's what he is," said George.

"Of course he is," Susan agreed. "I don't believe there's

anything whatever the matter with him, do you, Rosamund? '°

"What ?"

"Anything the matter with Uncle Timothy."

"No--no, I shouldn't think so." Rosamund was vague. She apologised. "I'm sorry. I was thinking about what lighting would be right for the table."

"You see ?" said George. "A woman of one idea. Your

wife's a dangerous woman, Michael. I hope you realise it."

"I realise it," said Michael rather grimly.

George went on with every appearance of enioyment. "The Battle of the Table l To be fought to-morrow--politely--but with grim determination: We ought all to take

sides. I back Rosamund who looks so sweet and yielding and isn't. Husbands, presumably back their own wives. Miss Gilchrist ? On Susan's side, obviously."

"Oh, really, Mr. Crossfield, I wouldn't venture to----"

"Aunt Helen ?" George paid no attention to Miss Gilchrist's flutterings. "You have the casting vote. Oh, er --I forgot. M. Pontarlier ?"

"Pardon ?" Hercule Poirot looked blank.

George considered explanations, but decided against it. The poor old boy hadn't understood a word of what was going on. He said: "Just a family joke."

"Yes, yes, I comprehend." Poirot smiled amiably.

"So yours is the casting vote, Aunt Helen. Whose side are you on ?"

Helen smiled.

"Perhaps I want it myself, George."

She changed the subject deliberately, turning to her foreign guest.

"I'm afraid this is all very dull for you, M. Pontarlier ?"

"Not at all, Madame. I consider myself privileged to be admitted to your family life--" he bowed. "I would like to say--I cannot quite express my meaning--my regret that this house had to pass out of your hands into the hands of strangers. It is without doubt--a great sorrow."

"No, indeed, we don't regret at all," Susan assured him.

"You are very amiable, Madame. It will be, let me tell you, perfection here for my elderly sufferers of persecution. What a haven I What peace I beg you to remember that,



when the harsh feelings come to you as assuredly they must. I hear that there was also the question of a school coming here---not a regular school, a conventwrun by religeuses--by 'nuns,' I think you say ? You would have preferred that. perhaps ?"

"Not at all," said George.

"The Sacred Heart of Mary," continued Poirot. "For

tunately, owing to the kindness of an unknown benefactor

we were able to make a slightly higher offer." He addressed

Miss Gilckrist directly. "You do not like nuns, I think ?"

Miss Gilchrist flushed and looked embarrassed.

,

"Oh, really, Mr. Pontarlier, you mustn't--I mean, it's

nothing personal. But I never do see that it's right to shut

yourself up from the world in that way--not necessary, I mean,

and really almost selfish, though not teaching ones, of course, or the ones that go about amongst the poor--because I'm sure

they're thoroughly unselfish women and do a lot of good."

"I simply can't imagine wanting to be a nun," said Susan. "It's very becoming," said Rosamund. "You remember

--when they revived The Miracle last year.

Sonia Wells

looked absolutely too glamorous for words."

"What beats me," said George, "is why it should be

pleasing to the Almighty to dress oneself up in medieval dress.

For after all, that's all a nun's dress is. Thoroughly cumber

some, unhygienic and impractical."

"And it makes them look so alike, doesn't it ?" said Miss Gilchrist. "It's silly, you know, but I got quite a turn when I was at Mrs. Abernethie's and a nun came to the door, collecting. I got it into my head she was the same as a nun who came to the door on the day of the inquest on poor Mrs. Lansquenet at Lychett St. Mary. I felt, you know, almost as though she had been following me round I"

"I thought nuns always collected in couples," said George. "Surely a detective story hinged on that point once ?"

"There was only one this time," said Miss Gilchrist. "Perhaps they've got to economise," she added vaguely. "And anyway it couldn't have been the same nun, for the

other one was collecting for an organ for St.--Barnabas, I think--and this one was for something quite different--some thing to do with children."

"But they both had the same type of features ?" Hercule Poirot asked. He sounded interested. Miss Gilchrist turned to him.

"I suppose that must be it. The upper lip--almost as though she had a moustache. I think you know, that that is

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really what alarmed me--being in a rather nervous state at the time, and remembering those stories during the war of nuns who were really men and in the Fifth Column and lande by parachute. Of course it was very foolish of me. I knew that afterwards."

"A nun would be a good disguise," said Susan thoughtfully. "It hides your feet."

"The truth is," said George, "that one very seldom looks properly at anyone. That's why one gets such wildly differing accounts of a person from different witnesses in court. You'd be surprised. A man is often described as tall--short; thin --stout; fair--dark; dressed in a dark--light--suit; and so on. There's usually one reliable observer, but one has to make up one's mind who that is."

"Another queer thing," said Susan," is that you sometimes catch sight of yourself in a mirror unexpectedly and don't know who it is. It,just looks vaguely familiar. And you say to yourself, 'That s somebody I know quite well.., and then suddenly realise it's yourself I"

George said: "It would be more difficult still if you could really see yourself---and not a mirror image."

"Why ?" asked Rosamund, looking puzzled.

"Because, don't you see, nobody ever sees themselves--as they appear to other people. They always see themselves in a glass--that is--as a reversed image."

"But does that look any different ?"

"Oh, ye, s," said Susan quickly. "It must. Because people's faces aren t the same both sides. Their eyebrows are different, and their mouths go up one side, and their noses aren't really straight. You can see with a pencil--who's got a pencil ?"

Somebody produced a pencil, and they experimented, holding a pencil each side of the nose and laughing to see the ridiculous variation in angle.

The atmosphere now had lightened a good deal. Everybody was in a good humour. They were no longer the heirs of Richard Abernethie gathered together for a division of prop-erty. They were a cheerful and normal set of people gathered together for a week-end in the country.

Only Helen Abernethie remained silent and abstracted.

With a sigh, Hercule Poirot rose to his feet and bade his hostess a polite good night.

"And perhaps, Madame, I had better say good-bye. My train departs itself at nine o'clock to-morrow morning. That is very early. So I will thank you now for all your kindness

and hospitality. The date of possession--that will be arranged



with the good Mr. Entwhistle. To suit your convenience, of course.' '

"It can be any time you plea§e, M. Pontarlier. I--I have finished all that I came here to do."

7, You,will return now to your villa at Cyprus ?"

Yes. A little smile curved Helen Abernethie's lips.

Poirot said:

"You are glad, yes. You have no regrets ?"

"At leaving England ? Or leaving here, do you mean ?"

"I meant--leaving here ?"

"No--no. It's no good, is it, to cling on to the past ?

One must leave that behind one."

"If one can." Blinking his eyes innocently PoJrot smiled

apologetically round on the group of polite faces that sur

rounded him.

"Sometimes, is it not, the Past will not be left, will not

suffer itself to pass into oblivion ? It stands at one's elbow--

it says ' I am not done with yet.'"

Susan gave a rather doubtful laugh. Poirot said:

"But I am serious--yes."

"You mean," said Michael," that your refugees when they

come here will not be able to put their past sufferings comple,,tely behind them ?"

,,

I did not mean my Refugees.

"He meant us, darling," said Rosamund. "He means

Uncle Richard and Aunt Cora and the hatchet, and all that."

She turned to Poirot.

"Didn't you ?"

Poirot looked at her with a blank face. Then he said: "Why do you think that, Madame ?"

"Because you re a detectve, aren t you That's why

you're here. N.A.R.C.O., or whatever you call it, is just

nonsense, isn't it ?"

# CHAPTER XX

TItERE WAS a moment of extraordinary tenseness. Poirot
felt it, though he himself did not remove his eyes from Rosamund's
lovely placid face.

He said with a little bow, "You have great perspicacity,
Madame."

"Not really," said Rosamund. "You were pointed out to
me once in a restaurant. I remembered."

"But you have not mentioned it--until now ?"

"I thought it would be more fun not to," said Rosamund

Michael said in an imperfectly controlled voice: "My--dear girl."

Poirot shifted his gaze then to look at him.

Michael was angry. Angry and something else--apprehensive
?

Poirot's eyes went slowly round all the faces. Susan's,
angry and watchful; Gregory's dead and shut in; Miss
Gilchrist's, foolish, her mouth wide open; George, wary;
Helen, dismayed and nervous ....

All those expressions were normal ones under the circumstances.

He wished he could have seen their faces a split
second earlier, when the words "a detective" fell from

Rosamund's lips. For now, inevitably, it could not be quite the same ....

He squared his shoulders and bowed to them. His language and his accent became less foreign.

"Yes," he said. "I am a detective."

George Crossfield said, the white dints showing once more each side of his nose, "Who sent you here ?"

"I was commissioned to inquire into the circumstances of Richard Abernethie's death."

"By whom ?"

"For the moment, that does not concern you. But it would be an advantage, would it not, if you could be assured beyond any possible doubt that Richard Abernethie died a natural death ?"

"Of course he died a natural death. Who says anything else ?"

"Cora Lansquenet said so. And Cora Lansquenet is dead herself."

A little wave of uneasiness seemed to sigh through the room like an evil breeze.

"She said it here--in this room," said Susan. "But I didn't really think "

"Didn't you, Susan ?" George Crossfield turned his sardonic glance upon her. "Why pretend any more ? You won't take M. Pontarlier in ?"

"We all thought so really," said Rosamund.

"And his

name isn't Pontarlier it's Hercules something."

"Hercule Poirot--at your service."

Poirot bowed.

There were no gasps of astonishment or of apprehension.

His name seemed to mean nothing at all to them.



They were less alarmed by it than they had been by tho

single word" detective."

"May I ask what conclusions you have come to ?" asked

George.

"He won't tell you, darling," said Rosamund. "Or if he

does tell you, what he says won't be true."

Alone of the company she appeared to be amused.

Hercule Poirot looked at her thoughtfully.

Itercule Poirot did not sleep well that night. He was perturbed,

and he was not quite sure why he was perturbed.

Elusive snatches of conversation, various glances, odd move-ments--all

seemed fraught with a tantalising significance in

the loneliness of the night. He was on the threshold of sleep,

but sleep would not come. Just as he was about to drop off, something flashed into his mind and woke him up again.

Paint Timothy and paint. Oil paint--the smell of oil paint--connected somehow with Mr. Entwhistle. Paint and Cora.

Cora's paintings--picture postcards .... Cora was deceitful about her painting... No, back to Mr. Entwhistle--some-thing Mr. Entwhistle had said--or was it Lanscombe ? A nun who came to the house on the day that Richard Abernethie died. A nun with a moustache. A nun at Stansfield Grange ---and at Lytchett St. Mary. Altogether too many nuns l

Rosamund looking glamorous as a nun on the stage. Rosaround--saying that he was a detective--and everyone staring at her when she said it. That was the way that they must all have stared at Cora that day when she said "But he was murdered, wasn't he ?" What was it Helen Abernethie had felt to be "wrong" on that occasion ? Helen Abernethie --leaving the past behind--going to Cyprus... Helen dropping the wax flowers with a crash when he had said4 what was it he had said ? He couldn't quite remember ....

He slept then, and as he slept he dreamed...

He dreamed of the green malachite table. On it was the glass-covered stand of wax flowers--only the whole thing had been painted over with thick crimson oil pa.t. Paint the colour of blood. He could smell the paint, and Timothy was gr rang, was saying I m dying--dying.., ths ts the end.

.And lIaude, standing by, tall and stem, with a large knife ',m,

her hand was echoing him, saying "Yes, it'a the end ....

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The end--a deathbed, with candles and a nun praying. If he could just see the nun's face, he would know ....

Hercule Poirot woke up--and he did know 1

Yes, it was the end ....

Though there was still a long way to go.

lie sorted out the various bits of the mosaic.

Mr. Entwhistle, the smell of paint, Timothy's house and something that must be in it--or might be in it... the wax flowers... Helen... Broken glass...

Helen Abernethie, in her room, took some time in going to bed. She was thinking.

Sitting in front of her dressing-table, she stared at herself

unseeingly in the glass.

She hadbeen forced into having Hercule Poirot in the house. She had not wanted it. But Mr. Entwhistle had made it hard for her to refuse. And now the whole thing had come out into the open. No question any more of letting Richard Abernethie lie quiet in his grave. All started by those few words of Cora's ....

That day after the funeral... How had they all looked, she wondered ? How had they looked to Cora ? How had she herself looked ?

What was it George had said ? About seeing oneself ?

There was some quotation, too. To see ourselves as others see us .... As others see us.

The eyes that were staring into the glass unseeingly suddenly focused. She was seeing herself--but not really herself--not herself as others saw her--not as Cora had seen her that day.

Her rightmno, her left eyebrow was arched a little higher than the right. The mouth ? No, the curve of the mouth was symmetrical. If she met herself she would surely not see much difference from this mirror image. Not like Cora.

Cora--the picture came quite clearly... Cora, on the day of the funeral, her head tilted sideways--asking her question--looking at Helen...

Suddenly Helen raised her hands to her face. She said to herself. "It doesn't make sense.., it can't make sens . . .



4

Miss Entwhistle was aroused from a delightful dream in which she was playing Piquet with Queen Mary, by the ringing of the telephone.

She tried to ignore it--but it persisted. Sleepily she raised her head from the pillow and looked at the watch beside her bed. Five minutes to seven--who on earth could be ringing

up at that hour ? It must be a wrong number.

The irritating ding-ding continued. Miss Entwhistle sighed,

snatched up a dressing-gown and marched into the sitting room.

"This is Kensington 675498," she said with asperity as she

picked up the receiver.

"This is Mrs. Abernethie speaking. Mrs. Lo Abernethie.

Can I speak to Mr. Entwhistle ?"

"Oh, good morning, Mrs. Abernethie." The "good

morning" was not cordial. "This is Miss Entwhistle. My

brother is still asleep I'm afraid. I was asleep myself."

"I'm so sorry," Helen was forced to t.he apology." But

it's v,e, ry important that I should speak m your brother at

once.

"Wouldn't it do later ?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Oh, very well then."

Miss Entwhistle was tart.

She tapped at her brother's door and went in.

"Those Abernethies again I" She said bitterly.

"Eh I The Abernethies ?"

"Mrs. Leo Abernethie. Ringing up before seven in the

morning I Really t"

"Mrs. Leo, is at } Dear me. How remarkable. Where is

my dressing-gown ? Ah, thank you."

Presently he was saying:

"Entwhistle speaking. Is that you, Helen ?"

"Yes. I'm terribly sorry to get you out of bed like this.

But you did tell me once to rtng you up at once if I remembered

what it was that struck me as having been wrong somehow

on the day of the funeral when Cora electrified us all by sug
gesting that Richard had been murdered."

"Ah [ You have remembered ?"

Helen said in a puzzled voice: ,

"

'

'

rise

Yes, but tt doesnt make se .



"You must allow me to be the judge of that.

Was it

so,m, ethin, q you noticed about one of the people ?

Yes.

"Tell me."

"It seems absurd." Helen's voice sounded apologetic. "But I'm quite sure of it. It came to me when I was looking at myself in the glass last night. Oh . . ."

The little startled half c.ry was succeeded by a sound that came oddly through the wres--a dull heavy sound that Mr.

Entwhistle couldn't place at all.

He said urgently:

"Hallohallo--are you there ? Helen, are you there ?... Helen..

CHAPTER XXI

IT wss sot until nearly an hour later that Mr. Entwhistle, after a great deal of conversation with supervisors and others, found himself at last speaking to Hercule Poirot.

"Thank heaven!" said Mr. Entwhistle with pardonable exasperation. "The Exchange seems to have had the greatest difficulty in getting the number."

"That is not surprising. The receiver was off the hook."

There was a grim quality in Poirot's voice which carried through to the listener.

Mr. Entwhistle said sharply:

"Has something happened ? °"

"Yes. Mrs. Leo Abernethie was found by the housemaid about twenty minutes ago lying by the telephone in the study. She was unconscious. A serious concussion."

"Do you mean she was struck on the head ?"

"I think so. It is just possible that she fell and struck her head on a marble doorstop, but me I do not think so, and the doctor, he does not think so either."

"She was telephoning to me at the time. I wondered when

W

e were cut off so suddenly.

"So it was to you she was telephoning ? What did she say?"

"She mentioned to me some time ago that on the occasion when Cora Lansquenet suggested her brother had been murdered, she herself had a feeling of something being wrong --odd--she did not quite know how to put it--unfortunately she could not remember uhy she had that impression."

"And suddenly, she did remember ?"

x56

"Yes."

"And rang you up to tell you ? °'

"Yes."

"Eh bien ?"

"There's no eh bien about it," said Mr. Entwhistle testily.

"She started to te me, but was terrupted.' "How much had she said ?" "Nothing pertinent."

"You will excuse me, mort ami, but I am the judge of that,

no, you. What exactly did she say ?"

She reminded me that I had asked her to let me ow at

once if she remembered what it was that had stck her

culiar. She said she had rememberedbut that it ' di't

make sense.'

"I asked her if it w something about one of the people

who were there that day, and she said, yes, it w. She said

it had come to her when she was lookg the gls "

"at was ."

"She gave no hint twhich of the ople concerned it

was '

"I should hary fa to let you ow if she had told me th," said Mr. Entwhistle aciy.

"I alogise, mon ami. Of cour you wod have told

me."

Mr. Entwhistle said:

"We sh just have to wait until she rovers consciousns

before we know."

Poirot said avely:

"That may not be for a we long time. Perhaps never."

"Is it. bad that ?" Mr. Entwstle's voice shook

a little.

"Yes, it h as bad as that."

"Butthat's teble, Poirot."

"Yes, it h terrible. And it h why we cnot afford to

wait. For it shows that we have to deM th someone who is

either completely ruthle or so frightened that it com to the

same thing."

"But lk here, Poirot, what about Helen ? I feel woed.

she would not be safe. So she is not at Enderby.

Already the ambulce has come and is takg her to a nursing

home where she have speci nurs and where one, gfiy or othese, 11 be owed to see her."

. Entwhistle sighed.

"You relieve my mind I She might have been in danger."

"She assuredly would have been in danger I °°

,M.. Entwhistle's voice sounded deeply moved.

have a great regard for Helen Abernethie. I alway

have had. A woman of very exceptionaJ character, She may

have had certain--what shall I say ?--reticences in her life."

"Ah, there were reticences ?"

"I have always had an idea that such was the case."

"Hence the villa in Cyprus. Yes, that explains a good

deal "

"I doa't want you to begin thinking"

"You cannot stop me thinking. But now, there is a little commission that I have for you. One moment."

There was a pause, then Poirot's voice spoke again.

"I had to make sure that nobody was listening. All is well. Now here is what I want you to do for me. You must pr,e, pare to make a journey."

,,

A journey ?" Mr. Entwhistle sounded faintly dismayed Oh, I see--you want me to come down to Enderby ?

'

"Not at all. I am in charge here. No, you will not have to travel so far. Your journey will not take you very far from London. You will travel to Bury St. Edmunds--(Ma .fo/! what names your English towns have l) and there you will hire a car and drive to Forsdyke House. It is a Mental Home. Ask for Dr. Penrith and inquire of him particulars ab,o,u.t a patient who was recently discharged.○'

What patient ? Anyway, surely"

Poirot broke in:

*' The name of the patient is Gregory Ban,k,,,. Find out for

what form of insanity he was being treated.

"Do you mean that Gregory Banks is insane ?"

"Sh I Be careful what you say. And now--I have not yet

breakfasted and you, too, I suspect have not breakfasted ?"

"Not yet. I was too anxious----"

"Quite so. Then, I pray you, eat your breakfast, repose

yourself. There is a good train to Bury St. Edmunds at twelve

o'clock. If I have any more news I will telephone you before

you start."

"Be careful of yoursdJPoirot," said Mr. Entwhistle with

some concern.

"Ah that, yes Me, I do not want to be hit on the head

with a marble doorstop. You may be assured that I will take

every precaution. And now--for the moment--good-bye."

Poirot heard the sound of the receiver being replaced at

the other end, then he heard a very faint second click--and



smiled to himself. Somebody had replaced the receiver on the telephone in the hall.

He went out there. There was no one about. He tiptoed to the cupboard at the back of the stairs and looked inside. At that moment Lanscombe came through the service door carrying a tray with toast and a silver coffee pot. He looked

slightly surprised to see Poirot emerge from the cupboard.
"Breakfast is ready in the dining-room, sir," he said.
Poirot surveyed him thoughtfully.

The old butler looked white and shaken.

"Courage," said Poirot, clapping him on the shoulder. "All will yet be well. Would it be too much trouble to serve me a cup of coffee in my bedroom ?"

"Certainly, sir. I will send Janet up with it, sir.' ' Lanscombe looked disapprovingly at Hercule Poirot's back as the latter climbed the stairs. Poirot was attired in an exotic silk dressing-gown with a pattern of triangles and squares.

"Foreigners I" thought Lanscombe bitterly. "Foreigners in the house I And Mrs. Leo with concussion I I don't know what we're coming to. Nothing's the same since Mr. Richard died."

Hercule Poirot was dressed by the time he received his coffee-from Janet. His murmurs of sympathy were well received, since he stressed the shock her discovery must have given her.

"Yes, indeed, sir, what I felt when I opened the door of the study and came in with the Hoover and saw Mrs. Leo lying

there I never shah forget. There she lay--and I made sure she was dead. She must have been taken faint as she stood at the phone--and fancy her being up at that time in the morning I I've never known her do such a thing before."

"Fancy, indeed " He added casually: "No one else was up, I suppose ?"

"As it happens, sir, Mrs. Timothy was up and about. She's a very early riser always--often goes for a walk before brek-fast."

"She is of the generation that rises early," said Poirot nodding his head. "The younger ones, now--4hy do not get up so early ?"

o, mcteea, sir, all fast asleep when I brought them their tea--and very late I was, too, what with the shock and getting the doctor to come and having to have a cup first to steady myself."

She went off and Poirot reflected on what she had said.

Maude Aberuethie had been up and about, and the younger generation had been in bed--but that, Poirot reflected, meant nothing at all. Anyone could have heard Helen's door open and close, and have followed her down to listen--and would afterwards have made, a point of being fa, st asleep in bed.

"But if I am right, ' thought Poirot. And after all, it is natural to me to be right--it is a habit I have l--then there is no need to go into who was here and who was there. First, I must seek a proof where I have deduced the proof may be. And then--I mak,e, my little speech. And I sit back and see what happens...

As soon as Janet had left the room, Poirot drained his coffee cup, put on his overcoat and his hat, left his room, rannimbly down the back staffs and left the house by the side door. He walked briskly the quarter-mile to the post office where he demanded a trunk call. Presently he was once more speaking to Mr. Entwhistle.

"Yes, it is I yet again I Pay no attention to the commission with which I entrusted you. CYtait unt blague/ Someone was listening. Now, mon viex, to the real commission.

You must, as I said, take a train. But not to Bury St. Edmunds. I want you to proceed to the house of Mr. Timgthy Abernethie."

"But Timothy and Maude are at Enderby."

"Exactly. There is no one in the house but a woman by the name of Jones who has been persuaded by the offer (t

siderable largssto guard the house whilst they are absent;

at I want you to do is to take something out of that house! ' "My dear Poirot I I really can't stoop to burglary I" "It will not seem like burglary. You will say to the

excellent Mrs. Jones who knows you, that you have been asked

by Mr. or Mrs., Abernethie to fetch this particular object and

take it to London. She will not suspect anything amiss."

"No, no, probably not. But I'don't like it." Mr. Entwhistle

sounded most reluctant. "Why can't you go and get whatever

it is yourself."

"Because, my friend, I should be a stranger of foreign

appearance and as such a suspicious character, and Mrs. Jones

would at once raise the difficulties I With you, she will not."

"No, no--I see that. But what on earth are Timothy and

Maude going to think when th,,ey hear about it ? I have

known them for forty odd years.

"And you knew Richard Abernethie for that time also, l

And you knew Cora Lansquenet when she was a little girl I '

In a martyred voice Mr. Entwhistle asked:



,' You're sure this is really necessary, Poirot ?"

"The old question they asked in the wrtime on the Is .you.r journey really ncessary ? I say t you, it is nosterS.essary.

It

Poirot told him.

"But really, Poirot, I don't see

"It is not necessary for you to see. I an doing the [ , „

"And what do you want me to do with the eemg.

/amned

thing ?"

"You will take it to London, to an addr? in E

Gardens. If you have a pencil, note it down.

Park

Having done so, Mr. Entwhistle said, still in his lkrtyred

voice:

"I hope you know what you are doing, ,Pokot ?"

He sounded Very doubtulmbut Poirot s reply

doubtful at all.

as not

"Of course I know what I am doing. We are nea&ing the

end."

Mr. Entwhistle sighed:

"If we could only guess what Helen was going to t:[l1 me."

"No need to guess. I know."

"You know ? But my dear Poirot"

"Explanations must wait. But let me assure yota

I know what Helen A bernethie saw trhn she looked if this.

mirror."

in her

Breakfast had been an uneasy meal. Neither Rot

nor Timothy had appeared, but the others were there h'amund

talked in rather subdued tones and eaten a little leX, nd had

'

s than

they normally would have done.

George was the first one to recover his spirits.

perament was mercurial and optimistic,

tern"

I expect Aunt Helen will be all right," he s,aid. "Ix always like to pull a long face. After all, what s
conc/:Jocrors

Often clears up completely in a couple of days."

lssion ?

"A woman I knew had concussion during the wa

Miss Gilchrist conversationally. "A brick or somet}id' said

her as she was walking down Tottenham Court Roading hit

during fly bomb time--and she never felt anything qt was

Jus. t went on with what she was doingand collaps!a,t, all.

tram to Liverpool twelve hours later. And would you .ct m a

it, she had no recollection at all of going to the statlbelieve

bn and

...

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IF

catching the train or anything. She just couldn't understand
it when she woke up in hospital. She was there for nearly
three weeks."

"What I can't make out," said Susan, "is what Helen was
doing telephoning at that unearthly hour, and who she was

telephoning to ?"

"Felt ill," said Mande with decision." Probably woke up

feeling queer and came down to ring up the doctor. Then

had a giddy fit and fell. That's the only thing that makes

sense."

"Bad luck hitting her head on that doorstop," said Michael. "If she'd just pitched over on to that thick pile carpet she'd

have been all right."

The door opened and Rosamund ,crime in, frow,ning.

"I can't find those wax flowers, she said. ' I mean th:e

ones that were standing on the malachite table the day of

Uncle Richard's funeral." She looked accusingly at Susan. "You haven't taken them ?"

"Of course I haven't 1 Really, Rosamund, you're not still thinking about malachite tables with poor old Helen carted

off,,t hoslital with concussion, ?"

don t see why I shouldn t think about them. If you've

got concussion you don't know what's happening and it doesn't

matter to you. We can't do anything for Aunt Helen, and

Michael and I have got to get back to London by tomorrow

lunch-time because we're seeing Jackie Lygo about lSehing

dates for The Baronet's Progr.e, ss. So I'd like to fix up

definitely about the table. But I d like to have a look at those

wax flowers again. There's a kind of Chinese vase on the

table now--nice--but not nearly so period. I do wonder

where they are--perhaps Lanscombe knows."

Lanscombe had just looked in to see if they had finished

breakfast.

"We're all through, Lanscombe," said George getting up.

"What's happened to our foreign friend ?"

"He is having his coffee and toast served upstairs, sir." "Petit dejeunr for N.A.R.C,O.'"

"Lanscombe, do you know where those wax flowers are

that used to be on that green table in the drawing-room ?

asked Rosamund.

"I understand Mrs. Leo had an accident with them, re'am.

She was going to have a new glass shade made, but I don't

think she has seen about it yet."

"Then where is the thing ?"

"It would probably be in the cupboard behind the staircase,

x6a

re'am. That is where things are usually placed when awaiting repair. Shall I ascertain for you ?"

"I'll go and look myself. Come with me, Michael sweetie.

It's dark there, and I'm not going in any „dark corners by

myself after what happened to Aunt Helen.

Everybody showed a sharp reaction. Maude demanded in

her deep vmce:

"What do you mean, Rosamund ?"

"Well, she was coshed by someone, wasn't she ?"

,G, regory Banks said sharply:

' She was taken suddenly faint and fell."

Rosamund laughed.

"Did she tell you so ? Don't be silly, Grey, of course she was coshed."

George said sharply:

"You shouldn't say things like that, Rosamund." "Nonsense," said Rosamund. "She must have been. I mean, it all adds up. A detective in the house looking for clues, and Uncle Richard poisoned, and Aunt Cora killed with a hatchet, and Miss Gilchrist given poisoned wedding cake, and now Aunt Helen struck down with a blunt instrument. You'll see, it will go on like that. One after another of us will be killed and the one that's left will be It--the murderer, I mean. But it's not going to be me--who's killed, I mean."

"And why should anyone want to kill you, beautiful Rosa-round ?" asked George lightly.

Rosamund opened her eyes very wide.

"Oh," she said. "Because I know too much, of course."

"What do you know ?" Maude Abernethie and Gregory Banks spoke almost in unison.

Rosamund gave her vacant and angelic smile.

"Wouldn't you all like to know ?" she said agreeably.

"Come on, Michael."

## CHAPTER XXII

AT ELEVEN O'CLOCK, Hercule Poirot called an informal meeting in the library. Everyone was there and Poirot looked thoughtfully ro,u, nd the se,,m,i-circle of faces.

"Last night, he said, Mrs. Shane announced to you that

I was a private detective. For myself, I hoped to retain my ---camouflage, shall we say ?ma little longer. But no matter 1

To-day--or at most the day after--I would have told you the

truth. Please listen carefully now to what I have to say.

"I am in my own line a celebrated person--I may say

most celebrated person. My gifts, in fact, are unequalled [

George Crossfield grinned and said:

"That's the stuff, M. Pont--no, it's M. Poirot, isn't it

Funny, isn't it, that I've never even heard of you ?"

"It is not funny," said Poirot severely. "It is lamentable

Alas, there is no proper education nowadays. Apparently one

learns nothing but economics--and how to set Intelligence

Tests I But to continue. I have been a friend for many years

of Mr. Entwhistle's"

"So he's the nigger in the wood pile "

"If you like to put it that way, Mr. Crossfield. Mr. Ent-whistle

was greatly upset by the death of his old friend,

Mr. Richard Abernethie. He was particularly perturbed by

some words spoken on the day of the funeral by Mr. Abernethie's

sister, Mrs. Lansquenet. Words spoken in this very

room."

"Very silly--and just like Cora," said Maude. "Mr.

Entwhistle should have had more sense than to pay attention

to them I"

Poirot went on:

"Mr. Entwhistle was even more perturbed after the--the

coincidence, shall I say ?--of Mrs. Lansquenet's death. He

wanted one thing only--to be assured that that death zas a coincidence. In other words he wanted to feel assured that

Richard Abernethie had died a natural death. To that end

he commissioned me to make the necessary investigations."

There was a pause.

"I have made them..."

Again there was a pause. No one spoke.

Poirot threw back his head.

"Eh bien, you will all be delighted to hear that as a result

of my investigations there is absolutely no reason to bdive

that Mr. A bcrnethie died anything but a natral death. There is

no reason at all to believe that he was murdered!" He

smiled. He threw out his hands in a triumphant gesture. "That is good news, is it not ?"

It hardly seemed to be, by the way they took it. They

stared at him and in all but the eyes of one person there still

seemed to be doubt and suspicion.

The exception was Timothy Abernethie, who was nodding

his head in violent agreement.

"Of course Richard wasn't murdered," he said angrily.

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satisfied.

morning ?"

Maude said sharply:

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to get a troke

"Helen's just the age

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That's all t,,here is to that, Cd. Another

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"I see, said Rosam0

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"Coincidences,"

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asked him ..-"

Susan

said sharply:

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The summer-house was clearly visible from most of the

windows of the house. Surely, soon, someone would come ?

If not, his knowledge of human nature was deficient, and

his main premises incorrect.

He waited--and above his head a spider in its web waited

for a fly.

It was Miss Gilchrist who came first. She was flustered

an,d, upset and rather incohere,n,t.

Oh, Mr. Pontarlier--I can t remember your other name,"

she said. "I had to come and speak to you although I don't like doing it--but really I feel I ought to. I mean, after what

happened to poor Mrs. Leo this morning--and I think myself

Mrs. Shane was quits right--and not coincidence, and certainly

not a stroke--as Mrs. Timothy suggested, because my own

father had a stroke and it was quite a different appearance,

and anyway the doctor said concussion quite clearly I"

She paused, took breath and looked at Poirot with appealing

eyes.

"Yes," said Poirot gently and encouragingly. "You want

to tell me something ?

"As I say, I don't like doing it--because she's been so

kind. She found me the position with Mrs. ,Timothy and

everything. She's been really very kind. That s why I feel

so ungrateful. And even gave me Mrs. Lansquenet's musquash jacket which is really most handsome and fits beautifully

because it never matters if fur is a little on the large side.

And when I wanted to return her the amethyst brooch she wouldn't hsar of it "

" You are referring,"said Poirot gently, "to Mrs. Banks ?"

"Yes, you see ..." Miss Gilchrist looked down, twisting

her fingers unhappily. She looked up and said with a sudden

see,

"You mean you happened to overhear a conversation "

"No." Miss Gilchrist shook her head with an air of heroic

determination. "I'd rher speak the truth. And it's not so

bad telling you because you're not English."

Hercule Poirot understood her without taking offence. "You mean that to a foreigner it is natural that people

should listen at doors and open letters, or read letters that

are left about ?"

"Oh, I'd never open anybody else's letters," said Miss

Gflchrist in a shocked tone. "Not that. But I did listen that

day--the day that Mr. Richard Abernethie came down to see

his sister. I was curious, you know, about his turning up



snddenl after .all those ,years., And I did wonder why--and--

u see wlen yon haven t much life of youi own or very

,,to get interested--when you reand--Y

many friends, you do tend

hying with anybody, I .mea.n. ,

"Most natural," saia t'olror.

"Yes, I do think it was natural... Though not, of course,

at all right. But I did it I And I heard what he said I"

"You heard what lr. Abernethie said to Mrs. Lansquenet?"

"Yes. He said something like--' It's no good talking to

Timothy lie pooh-poohs everything. Simply won't listen.

But I £ought I'd like to get it off my chest to you, Cora.

We three are the only. ones left,. And though you we always

liked to play the simpleton you we got a lot of co,m, mon sense.

So what wou!d you do about it, if yon were me ?

"I couldn t quite hear what Mrs. Lansquenet said, but

I caught the word police--,a, nd then Mr. Abernet,h, ie burst out

ouite loud, and said,' 1 can t do that. Not when it s a question

(;! ray own niece.' And then I had to run in the kitchen for

something b,oiling over and when I got back Mr. Abernethie

WaS saying, Even if I die an unnatural death I don't want

the police called in, if it can possibly be avoided. You under

...... --t -ou my dear girl But don't worry. Now

that I know, I shall take all possible precantons. And he

.

.

a new will, and that she, Cora,

would

be quite all right. Aha then ne sola aoou her having

been happy with her husband and how perhaps he'd made

a mistake over that in the past."

Miss Gilchrist stopped.

Pozrotsad: Ise see...

"But I never wanted to say--to tell· I didn't think

Mrs. Lansquenet would have wanted me to... But now

after Mrs. Leo being attacked this morning--and then you

saying so calmly it was coincidence. But, oh, M. Pontarlier,

t wash t comctdence I

Poirot smiled. He said:

"No, it wasn't coincidence    Thank

you, Miss Gilchrist,

for

coming to me. It was very necessary that you should."

He

had a little difficulty in getting rid of Miss Gilchrist, and

it was urgent that he should, for he hoped for further confidences.

His instinct was right. Miss Gilchrist had hardly.gone

before Gregory Banks, striding across the lawn, came nnpe

tuously into the summer-house. His face was pale and there

were beads of perspiration on his forehead. His eyes were

curiously excited.

"At last I "he said. "I thought that stupid woman would never go. You' re all wrong in what you said this morning. You're wrong about everything. Richard Abernethie was killed. I killed him."

Hercule Poirot let his eyes move up and down over the excited young man. He showed no surprise.

"So you killed him, did you ? How ?"

Gregory Banks smiled.

"It wasn't difficult for ms. You can surely realise that. There were fifteen or twenty different drugs I could lay my hands on that would do it. The method of administration took rather more thinking out, but I hit on a very,ingenious

idea in the end. The beauty of it was that I didn t need to

be anywhere near at the time."

"Clever," said Poirot.

"Yes." Grego,r.y Banks cast his eyes down mod,tly. He

seemed pleased. ' Yes--I do think it was ingenious.

Poirot asked with interest:

"Why did you kill him ? For the money that would come

to your wife ?"

"No. No, of course not." Greg was suddenly xcitediy

indignant. "I'm not a money grubber.

I didn t marry

Susan for her money I"

"Didn't you, Mr. Banks ?"

"That's what h thought," Greg said with sudden venom. "Richard Abernethie I He liked Susan, he admired her, he

was proud of her as an example of Abernethie blood But he

thought she'd married beneath her--he thought I was no

good--he despised me I I dare say I hadn't the right accentN

I didn't wear my clothes the right way. He was a snob---a

filthy snob I"

"I don't think so," said Poirot mildly. "From all I have

heard, Richard Abernethie. was no snob."

"He was. He was." The young man spoke with something

approaching hysteria. "He thought nothing of me. He

sneered at m,e,?lways very polite but underneath I could

s that he didn t like me I"

"Possibly."

"People can't treat me like that and get away with it!

They've tried it before l A woman who used to come and



have her medicines moAe up. She was rude to me. Do you know what I did ?"

"Yes," said Poirot.

Gregory looked startled. "So you know that ?" "Yes."

"She near! died." He spoke in a satisfied mnner.. "That. shows you I m not the sort of person to be trifled wlthl

Richard Abernethie despised me--and what happened to

him ? He died."

"A most successful murder," said Poirot with grave congratulation.

He added: "But why come and give yourself away--to

me?"

"Bec,a, use you said you were through with it all I Yo, u said

he hadn t been murdered. I had to show you that you re, not

as clever as you think You are--and besides--beside "Yes," said Poirot. "And besides ?"

Greg collapsed suddenly on to the bench. His face changed.

It took on a sudden ecstatic quality.

"It was wrong--wicked... I must be punished...

must go back there--to the place if punishment .. to atone

Yes, to atone 1 Repentance Retribution i"

"/tis face was alight now with a kind of glowing ecstasy.

Poirot studied him for a moment or two curiously.

Then he asked:

"How badly do you want to get away from your wife ?

Gregory's face changed.

"Susan ? Susan is wonderful--wonderful I"

"Yes. Susan is wonderful. That is a grave burden. Susan

loves you devotedly. That is a burden, too ?"

Gregory sat looking in front of him. Then he said, rather

in the manner of a sulky child:

"Why couldn't she let me alone ?"

He sprang up.

"She's coming now--across the lawn. I'll go now. But

you'll tell her what I told you ? Tell her I've gone to the

police station. To confess.'

Susan came in breathlessly.

"Where's Greg ? He was here I I saw him." "Yes." Poirot paused a moment--before saying:

"He

came to tell me that it was he who poisoned Richard Abernethie

....

"What absolute nosns You didn't believe him, I

hope ?"

"Why should I not believe him ?"

"He wasn't even near this place when Uncle Richard died I"

"Perhaps not. Where was he when Cora Lansquenet died ?"

"In London. We both were."

Hercule Poirot shook his head.

"No, no, that will not do. You, for instance, took out

your car that day and were away all the afternoon. I think

I know where you went. You went to Lytchett St. Mary." "I did no such thing I"

Poirot smiled.

"When I met you here, Madame, it was not, as I told you,

the first time I had seen you. After the inquest on Mrs. i.ansquenet

you were in the garage of the King's Arms. You talk

there to a mechanic and close by you is a car containing an

elderly foreign gentleman. You did not notice him, but he

noticed you."

"I don't see what you mean. That was the day of the

inquest."

"Ah, but remember what that mechanic said to you I He

asked you if you were a relative of the victim, and you said
you were her niece."
"He was just being a ghoul. They're all ghouls."
"And his next words were, ' Ah, wondered where I'd seen
you before.' Where did he see you before, Madame ? It
must have been in Lytchett St. Mary, since in his mind his
seeing you before was accounted for by your being Mrs.
Lansquenet's niece. Had he seen you near her cottage ?
And when ? It was a matter, was it not, that demands
inquiry. And the result of the inquiry is, that you were
there---in Lytchett St. Mary---on the afternoon Cora Lansquenet
died. You parked your car in the same quarry where
you left it the morning of the inquest. The car was seen and
the number was noted. By this time Inspector Morton knows
whose car it was."
Susan stared at him. Her breath came rather fast, but she
showed no signs of discomposure.
u re talking nonsense, M. Porot. And you're making
me forget what I came here to say--I wanted to try and find
you alone--"
"To confess to me that it was you and not your husband
who committed the murder ?"

XTO

"No, of course not. What kind of a fool do you think I am ? And I've already told you that Gregory never left London that day."

"A fact which you cannot possibly know since Irou were away yourself. Why did you go down to Lytchett St. Mary, Mrs. Banks ?"

Susan drew a deep breath.

"All right, if you must have it 1 What Cora said at the funeral worried me. I kept on thinking about it. Finally I decided to run down in the car and see her, and ask her what had put the idea into her head. Greg thought it a silly idea, so I didn't even tell him where I was going. I got there about three o'clock, knocked and rang, but there was no answer, so I thought she must be out or gone away. That's all there is to it. I didn't go round to the back of the cottage. If I had, I might have seen the broken window. I just went back to

London without the faintest idea there was anything wrong."

Poirot's face was non-committal. He said:

"Why does your husband accuse himself of the crime ?"

"Because he's "a word trembled on Susan's tongue and was rejected. Poirot seized on it.

"You were going to say ' because he is batty' speaking in

jest--but the jest was too near the truth, was it not ?"
"Greg's all right. He is. He is."

"I know something of his history," said Poirot. "He was for some months in Forsdyke House Mental Home before you met him."

"He was never certified. He was a voluntary patient."
"That is true. He is not, I agree, to be classed as insane. But he is, very definitely, unbalanced. He has a punishment

complex has had it, I suspect, since infancy."

Susan spoke quickly and eagerly:

"You don't understand, M. Poirot. Greg has never had a chance. That's why I wanted Uncle Richard's money so badly. Uncle Richard was so matter-of-fact. He couldn't understand. I knew Greg had got to set up for himself. He had got to feel he was someone--not just a chemist's assistant, being pushed

around. Everything will be different now. He will have his own laboratory. He can work out his own formulas."

"Yes, yes--you will give him the earth--because you love him. Love him too much for safety or for happiness. But you cannot give to people what they are incapable of receiving. At the end of it all, he will still be something that he does not want to be .... "

"What's that ?"

"Susan's husbal."

"How cruel you ar I And what nonsense ·

"Where Gregory Banks is concerned ou az ·

,

Y

unscrupmous.

You

wanted your uncle s money--not for y

your

husband. How butly did you want it ? ,

urselr--t)ut xor

Angrily, Susan turned

and

dashed away.

5

°"I thought," said Michael Shane lightly,

,, that I'd just come

along and say goodbye."

He smiled, and

his

smile

had a singularly,

intoxicating

quality.

Poirot was aware

of the man's vital charm·

He studied

Michael

Shane for some

momh ....

· nts m silence

He felt as thou§h he

knew this man least well %f all the hous

party, for Michael Shane

only showed the

side ........

he wanted to

show.m

mmsen

mat

"Your wife," said

Poirot conversationally,,

unusual woman."

very

Michael raised his eyebrows·

Do you thnk so.

She s a

lovely, I agreh.

so I've found, conspicuous for brains·

" But not, or

"She will never try to be

too clever," Poirot .....

she knows what

she wants· He

sghed So

....

Ah. Mchael s smile broke out agam. ,,

e. ,. .,

the malachite

table ?"

minting

"Perhaps." Poirot paused and added: "A nd of

what was

"The wax flowers, you mean ?"

"The wax

flowers."

Michael frowned.

„d t always qmte understand you, M,

ever, the smile was switched on again, "I'm Poirot. How-

, more thankful

than I can say that we re all out

of

the wood. It,

s un-leasant

to say the least of it, to go around with the · P. ..

, ,

suspicion

somehow or

omer one oI us muraerea poor from u

, · , · „

,, · qcle lXlcaara.

That

is how he seemed to you when yo

Poirot inquired.

"Poor old Uncle Richard ? met

nun t

"Of course he was very well preserved

and 11

that

"And

in

full

possession

of

his

faculties

"Oh

yes."

"And,

in

fact,

quite shrewd

?

'

o

"I dare

say."

"A shrewd judge of character."

The smile remained unaltered.

"You can't expect me to agree with that, M. Poirot. He didn't approve of ms."

"He thought you, perhaps, the unfaithful type ?" Poirot suggested.

Michael laughed.

"What an old-fashioned idea I"

"But it is true, isn't it ?"

"Now I wonder what you mean by that ?"

Poirot placed the tips of his fingers together.

"There have been inquiries made, you know," he murmured. "By you ?"

"Not only by me."

Michael Shane gave him a quick searching glance. His reactions, Poirot noted, were quick. Michael Shane was no fool.

"You mean--the police are interested ?"

"They have never been quite satisfied, you know, to regard the murder of Cora Lansquenet as a casual crime." "And they've been making inquiries about me ?"

Poirot said primly:

"They are interested in the movements of Mrs. Lansquenet's relations on the day that she was killed."

"That's extremely awkward." Michael spoke with a charming confidential rueful air.

"Is it, Mr. Shane ?"

"More so than you can imagine I I told Rosamund, you see, that I was lunching with a certain Oscar Lewis on that day."

"When, in actual fact, you were not ?"

"No. Actually I motored down to see a woman called Sorrel Dainton--quite a well-known actress. I was with her in her last show. Rather awkward, you see for though it's quite satisfactory as far as the police are concerned, it won't go down very well with Rosamund."

"Ah I" Poirot looked discreet. "There has been a little trouble over this friendship of yours ?"

"Yes... In fact--Rosamund made me promise I wouldn't see her any more."

"Yes, I can see that may be awkward... Entre nos, you had an affair with the lady ?"

"Oh, just one of those things I

It's not as though I cared

for the woman at all."

"But she cares for you ?"

"Well, she's been rather tiresome... Women do cling so.

However, as you say, the police at any rate will be satisfied." "You think so ? '

"Well, I could hardly be taking a hatchet to Cora if I was

dallying,,with Sorrel miles and miles away. She's got a cottage

in Kent.

"I see--I seeand this Miss Dainton, she will testify for

you ?"

"She won't like it--but as it's murder, I suppose she'll

have to do it."

"She will do it, perhaps, even if you were not dally/ng with

her."

"What do you mean ?" Michael looked suddenly black

as thunder.

"The lady is fond of you. When they are fond, women will

swear to what is true--and also to what is untrue."

"Do you mean to say that you don't believe me ?"

"It does not matter if I believe you or not. It is not 1

you have to satisfy." "Who then ?"

Poirot smiled.

"Inspector Morton--who has just come out on the terrace

through the side door."

Michael Shane wheeled round sharply.

## CHAPTER XXIII

"I tg^RD ¥OV were here, M. Poirot," said Inspector Morton.

The two men were pacing the terrace together.

"I came over with Superintendent Parwell from Matchfield.

Dr. Larraby rang him up about Mrs. Leo Abernethie and he's

come over here to make a few inquiries. The doctor wasn't

satisfied."

"And you, my friend," inquired Poirot, "where do you

come in ? You are a long way from your native Berkshire."

"I wanted to ask a few questions---and the people I wanted

to ask them of seemed very conveniently assembled here."

He paused before adding, "Your doing ?"

"Yes, my doing."

"And as a result Mrs. Leo Abernethie gets knocked out." "You must not blame me for that. If she had come to

me... But she did not. Instead she rang up her lawyer in

London."



mil I

"And was in process of spilling the beans to him when--Wonk

I"

"When--as you say--Wonk I °'

"And what had she managed to tell him ?"

"Very little. She had only got as far as telling him that she was looking at herself in the glass."

"Ah! well," said Inspector Morton philosophically. "Women will do it." He looked sharply at Poirot. "That suggests something to y, ou ?"

"Yes, I think I kndw what it was she was going to tell him."

"Wonderful guesser, aren't you ? You always were. Well, what was it ?"

"Excuse me, are you inquiring into the death of Richard Abernethie ?"

"Officially, no. Actually, of course, if it has a bearing on the murder of Mrs. Lansquenet "

"It has a bearing on that, yes. But I will ask you, my friend, to give me a few more hours. I shall know by then ii

what I have imagined--imagined only, you comprehend--is

correct. If it is. "

"Well, if it is ?"

"Then I may be able to place in your hands a piece of concrete evidence."

"We could certainly do with it," said Insl,,ctor Morton with feeling. He looked askance at Poirot. What have you been holding back ?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Since the piece of evidence I have imagined may not in fact exist. I have only deduced its existence from various scraps of conversation. I may,"

said Poirot in a completely unconvinced tone, "be wrong." Morton smiled.

"But that doesn't often happen to you ?"

"No. Though I will admit--yes, I am forced to admit--that it has happened to me."

"I must say I'm glad to hear it I To be always right must

be sometimes monotonous."

"I do not find it so," Poirot assured him.

Inspector Morton laughed.

"And you're asking me to hold of[ with my questioning ?"

"No, no, not at all. Proceed as you had planned to do.

I suppose you were not actually contemplating an arrest ?"

Morton shook his head.

"Much too flimsy for that. We'd have to get a decision

from the Public Prosecutor first--and we're a long way from

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that. No, just statements from certain parties of their movements

on the day in question--in one case with a caution, perhaps."

"I see. Mrs. Banks ?"

"Smart, aren't you ? Yes. She was there that day. Her car was parked in that quarry."

"She was not seen actually driving the car ?"

"No."

The Inspector added, "It's bad, you know, that she's

never said a word about being down there that day. She's

got to explain that satisfactorily."

"She is quite skilful at expla'nations," said Poirot dryly. "Yes. Clever young lady. Perhaps a thought too clever."

"It is never wise to be too clever. That is how murderers

get caught. Has anything more come up about George Crossfield ?"

"Nothing definite. He's a very ordinary type. There are a lot of young men like him going about the country in trains

and buses or on bicycles. People find it hard to remember

when a week or so has gone by if it was Wednesday or Thursday

when they were at a certain place or noticed a certain

person."

He paused and went on: "We've had one piece of rather

curious information--from the Motler Superior of some convent or other. Two of her nuns had been out collecting

from door to door. It seems that they went to Mrs. Lansquenet's

cottage on the day before she was murdered, but couldn't make anyone hear when they knocked and rang.

That's natural enough--she was up North at the Abernethie

funeral and Gilchrist had been given the day off and had

gone on an excursion to Bournemouth. The point is that

they say there was someone in the cottage. They say they heard

sighs and groans. I've queried whether it wasn't a day later

but the Mother Superior is quite definite that that couldn't

be so. It's all entered up in some book. Was there someone

searching for something in the cottage that day, who seized

the opportunity of both the women being away ? And did

that somebody not find what he or she was looking for and

come back the next day ? I don't set much store on the sighs

and still less on the groans. Even nuns are suggestible and

a cottage where murder has occurred positively asks for

groans. The point is, was there someone in the cottage who

shouldn't have been there ? And if so, who was it ? All the

Abernethie crowd were at the funeral."

Poirot asked a seemingly irrelevant question:

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"These nuns who were collecting in that district, did they return at all at a later date to try again ?"

"As a matter of fact they did come again--about a week later. Actually on the day of the inquest, I believe."

"That fits," said Hercule Poirot. "That fits very well."

Inspector Morton looked at him. "Why this interest in nuns ?"

"They have been forced on my attention whether I will

or no. It will not have escaped your attention, Inspector,

that the visit of the nuns was the same day that poisoned

wedding cake found its way into that cottage."

"You don't think Surely that's a ridiculous idea ?" "My ideas are never ridiculous," said Hercule Poirot

severely. "And now, mon cher, I must leave you to your

questions and to the inquiries into the attack on Mrs. Abernethie.

I myself must go in search of the late Richard Abernethie's

niece."

"Now be careful what you go saying to Mrs. Banks." ,

"I do not mean Mrs. Banks. I mean Richard Abernethie s other niece."

Poirot found Rosamund sitting on a bench overlooking a little stream that cascaded down in a waterfall and then flowed through rhododendron thickets. She was staring into the water.

"I do not, I trust, disturb an Ophelia," said Poirot as he took his seat beside her. "You are, perhaps, studying the rle ?"

"I've never played in Shakespeare," said Rosamund. "Except once in Rep. I was Jessica in The Merchant. A lousy part."

"Yet not without pathos. ' I am never merry when I hear sweet music.' What a load she carried, poor Jessica, the daughter of the hated and despised Jew. What doubts of herself she must have had when she brought with her her father's ducats when she ran away to her lover. Jessica with gold was one thing--Jessica without gold might have been another."

Rosamund turned her head to look at him.

"I thoughtyou'd gone," she said with a tou,ch of reproach.

She glanced down at her wrist-watch. "It s past twelve o'clock."

"I have missed my train," said Poirot.

"You think I missed it for a reason ?"

"I suppose so. You're rather precise, aren't you ? If

m wanted to catch a train, I should think you'd catch

"Your judgment is admirable. Do you know, Madame, I have been sitting in the little summer-house hoping that

you would, perhaps, pay me a visit there ?"

Rosamund stared at him.

"Why should I ? You more or less said good-bye to us all in the library."

"Quite so. And there was nothing--you wanted to say to

"No." Rosamund shook her head. "I had a lot I wanted to think about. Important things."

"i see."

"I don't often do much thinking," said Rosamund. "It seems a waste of time. But this is important. I think one ought to plan one's life just as one wants it to be."

"And that is what you are doing ?"

"Well, yes... I was trying to make a decision about sometking."

"About your husband ?"

"In a way."

Poirot waited a moment, then he said:

"Inspector Morton has just arrived here." He anticipated Rosamund's question by going on: "He is the police officer in charge of the inquiries about Mrs. Lansquenet's death. He has come here to get statements from you all about what you

were doing on the day she was murdered."

"I see. Alibis," said Rosamund cheerfully.

Her be&utiful face relaxed into an impish glee.

"That WilI be hell for Michael," she said. "He thinks I don't really know he went off to be with that woman that

r"How did you know ?

"It was obvious from the way he said he was going to lunch with Oscar. So frightfully casually, you know, and his nose twitching just a tiny bit like it always does when he tells lies."

"How devoutly thankful I am I am not married to you, Madame I"

"And then, of course, I made sure by ringing up Oscar," continued Rosamund. "Men always tell such silly Ues."

"He is not, I fear, a very faithful husband ?" Poirot

hazarded.

Rosamund, however, did not reject the statement.

"But you do not mind ?"

"Well, it's rather fun in a way," said Rosamund. "I mean, having a husband that all the other women want to snatch away from you. I should hate to be married to a man that nobody wanted--like poor Susan. Really Greg is so completely wet I"

Poirot was studying her.

"And suppose someone did succeed--in snatching your husband away fr, o,m you ?"

"The won't, ' said Rosamund. "Not now," she added. "You mean "Not now that there's Uncle Richard's money. Michael falls for these creatures in a way--that Sorrel Dainton woman nearly got her hooks into him--wanted him for keeps--but with Michael the show will always come first. He can launch out now in a big way--put his own shows on. Do some production as well as acting. He's ambitious, you know, and he really is good. Not like me, I adore acting---but I'm ham, though I look nice. No, I'm not worried about Michael any more. Because it's my money, you see."

Her eyes met Poirot's calmly. He thought how strange it was that both Richard Abernethie's nieces should have fallen deeply in love with men who were incapable of returning that love. And yet Rosamund was unusually beautiful and Susan

was attractive and full of sex appeal. Susan needed and clung to the illusion that Gregory loved her. Rosamund, clearsighted, had no illusions at all, but knew what she wanted.

"The point is," said Rosamund, "that I've got to make a big decision--about the future. Michael doesn't know yet."

Her face curved into a smile. "He found out that I wasn't shopping that day and he's madly suspicious about Regent's Park."

"What is this about Regent's Park ?" Poirot looked puzzled.

"I went there, you see, after Harley Street. Just to walk about and think. Naturally Michael thinks that if I went there at all, I went to meet some man t"

Rosamund smiled beatifically and added:

"He didn't like that at all I"

"But why should you not go to Regent's Park ? °°asked Poirot.

"Just to walk there, you mean ?"

"Yes. Have you never done it before ?"

"Never. Why should I ? What is there to go to Regent's Park for ?"

Poirot looked at her and said:

"For you--nothing."

He added:

"I think, Madame, that you must cede the green malachite

table to your cousin Susan."

Rosamund's eyes opened very wide.

"Why should I ? I want it."

"I know. I know. But you--you will keep your husband.

And the poor Susan, she will lose hers."

"Lose him ? Do you mean Greg's going off with someone ?

I wouldn't have believed it of him. He looks so wet."

"Infidelity is not the only way of losing a husband,

Madame."

"You don't mean ?" Rosamund stared at him. "You're not thinking that Greg poisoned Uncle Richard and

killed Aunt Cora and conked Aunt Helen on the head ?

That's ridiculous. Even I know better than that."

"Who did, taken ?"

"George, of course. George is a wrong un, you know, he's

mixed up in some sort of currency swindle--I heard about it

from some friends of mine who were in Monte. I expect

Uncle Richard got to know about it and was just going to cut

him out of his will."

Rosamund added complacently:

"I've always known it was George."

## CHAPTER XXI¥

THE TELEGRAM came about six o'clock that evening.

As specially requested it was delivered by hand, not telephoned,

and Hercule Poirot, who had been hovering for some time in the neighbourhood of the front door, was at hand to

receive it from Lanscombe as the latter took it from the

telegraph boy.

He tore it open with somewhat less than his usual precision.

It consisted of three words and a signature.

Poirot gave vent to an enormous sigh of relief.

Then he took a pound note from his pocket and handed it

to the dumbfounded boy.

x8o

"There are moments," he said to Lanscombe, "when

economy should be abandoned."

"Very possibly, sir," said Lanscombe politely.

"Where is Inspector Morton ?" asked Poirot.

"One of the police gentlemen," Lanscombe spoke with

distasteand indicated subtly that such things as names for

police officers were impossible to remember--" has left. The

other is, I believe, in the study."

"Splendid," said Poirot. "I join him immediately."

He once more clapped Lanscombe on the shoulder and said:

"Courage, we are on the point of arriving I"

Lanscombe looked slightly bewildered since departures, and

not arrivals, had been in his mind.

He said:

"You do not, then, propose to leave by the nine-thirty

train after all, sir ?"

"Do not lose hope," Poirot told him.

Poirot moved away, then wheeling round, he asked:

"I wonder, can you remember what were the first words

Mrs. Lansquenet said to you when she arrived here on the day of your master's funeral ?"

"I remember very well, sir," said Lanscombe, his face lighting up. "Miss Cora--I beg pardon, Mrs. La,,nsquenet--I always think of her as Miss Cora, somehow

"Very naturally."

"She said to me: ' Hallo, Lanscombe. It's a long time since you used to bring us out meringues to the huts.' All the children used to have a hut of their own--down by the fence in the Park. In summer, when there was going to be a dinner party, I used to take the young ladies and gentlemen--the younger ones, you understand, sir--some meringues. Miss Cora, sir, was always very fond of her food."

Poirot nodded.

"Yes," he said, "that was as I thought. Yes, it was very typical, that."

He went into the study to find Inspector Morton and without a word handed him the telegram.

Morton ,read it blankly.

"I don t understand a word of this."

"The time has come to tell you all."

Inspector Morton grinned.

"You sound like a young lady in a Victorian melodrama. But it's about time you came across with something. I can't hold out on this set-up much longer. That Bxnks fellow is still insisting that he poisoned Richard Abernethie and boasting



that we can't find out how. What beats me is why there's always somebody who comes forward when there's a murder and yells out that they did it I What do they think there is in it for them ? I've never been able to fathom that."

"In this case, probably shelter from the difficulties of being responsible for oneself--in other words---Forsdyke Sanatorium."

"More likely to be Broadmoor."

"That might be equally satisfactory."

"Did he do it, Poirot ? The Gilchrist woman came out with the story she'd already told you and it would fit with what

Richard Abernethie said about his niece. If her husband did
it, it would involve her. Somehow, you know, I can't visualise
that girl committing a lot of crimes. But there's nothing she
wouldn't do to try and cover him."

"I will tell you all- "

"Yes, yes, tell me all I And for the Lord's sake hurry up
and do it I"

This time it was in the big drawing-room that Hercule
Poirot assembled his audience.

There was amusement rather than tension in the faces that
were turned towards him. Menace had materialised in the
shape of Inspector Morton and Superintendent Parwell. With
the police in charge, questioning, asking for statements,
Hercule Poirot, private detective, lad receded into something
closely resembling a joke.

Timothy was not far from voicing the general feeling when
he remarked in an audible sotto vocto his wife:

"Damned little mountebank I Entwhistle must be gaga I --that's all I can say."

It looked as though Hercule Poirot would have to work hard
to make his proper effect.

He began in a slightly pompous manner.

"For the second time, I announce my departure l This
morning I announced it for the twelve o'clock train. This
evening I announce it for the nine-thirty--immediately, that

is, after dinner. I go because there is nothing more here for

me to do."

"Could have told him that all along." Timothy's commentary

was still in evidence. "Never was anything for him

to do. The cheek of these fallows I"

I8

"I came here originally to solve a riddle. The riddle is

solved. Let me, first, go over the various points which were

brought to my attention by the excellent Mr. Entwhistle.

"First, Mr. Richard Abernethie dies suddenly. Secondly,

after his funeral, his sister Cora Lansquenet says, 'He was

murdered, wasn't he ?' Thirdly Mrs. Lansquenet is killed.

The question is, are those three things part of a sequence ? Let us observe what happens next ? Miss Gilchrist, the dead

woman's companion, is taken ill after eating a piece of wedding

cake which contains arsenic. That, then, is the next step in

the sequence.

"Now, as I told you this morning, in the course of my

inquiries I have come across nothing--nothing at all, to

substantiate the belief that Mr. Abernethie was poispned.

Equally, I may say, I have found nothing to prove conclusively

that he was not poisoned. But as we proceed, things become

easier. Cora Lansquenet undoubtedly asked that sensational

question at the funeral. Everyone agrees upon that. And

undoubtedly, on the following day, Mrs. Lansquenet was murdered--a hatchet being the instrument employed. Now let us examine the fourth happening. The local post van drix*er is strongly of the beliefthough he will not definitely swear to it---that he did not deliver that parcel of wedding cake in the usual way. And if that is so, then the parcel was left by hand and though we cannot exclude a ' person unknown' --we must take particular notice of those people who were actually on the spot and in a position to put the parcel where it was subsequently found. Those were: Miss Gilchrist herself, of course; Susan Banks who came down that day for the inquest; Mr. Entwhistle (but yes, we must consider Mr. Entwhistle; he was present, remember, when Cork made her disquieting remark I) And there were two other people. An old gentleman who represented himself to be a Mr. Gutkrie, an art critic, and a nun or nuns wire called early that morning to collect a subscription.

"Now I decided that I would start on the assumption that the postal van driver's recollection was correct. Therefore the little group of people under suspicion must be very carefully studied. Miss Gilchrist did not benefit in any way by Richard Abernethie's death and in only a very minute degree by Mrs. Lansquenet's--in actual fact the death of the latter put her out of employment and left her with the possibility of finding it difficult to get new employment. Also Miss Gilchrist was taken to hospital definitely suffering from

arsenical poisoning.

x83

"Susan Banks did benefit from Richard Abernethie's death, and in a small degree from Mrs. Lansquenet's--though here her motive must almost certainly have been security. She might have very good reason to believe that Miss Gilchrist had overheard a conversation between Cora Lansquenet and her brother which referred to her, and she might therefore decide that Miss Gilchrist must be eliminated. She herself, remember, refused to partake of the wedding cake and also suggested not calling in a doctor until the morning, when Migs Gilchrist was taken ill in the night.

"Mr. Entwhistle did not benefit by either of the deaths--but he had had considerable control over Mr. Abernethie's affairs, and the trust funds, and there might well be some reason why Richard Abernethie should not live too long. IBut--you will say--if it is Mr. Entwhistle who was concerned, why should he come to me ?

"And to that I will answer--it is not the first time that a murderer has been too sure of himself.

"We now come to what I may call the two outsiders. Mr. Guthrie and a nun. If Mr. Guthrie is really Mr. Guthrie, the art critic, then that clears him. The same applies to the nun, if she is really a nun. The question is, are these people themselves, or are they somebody else ?

"And I may say that there seems to be a curious---motif-- one might call it--of a nun running through this business. A nun comes to the door of Mr. Timothy Abernethie's house and Miss Gilchrist believes it is the same nun she has seen at Lychett St. Mary. Also a nun, or nuns, called here the day before Mr. Abernethie died..."

George Crossfield murmured, "Three to one, the nun."

Poirot went on:

"So he we have certain pieces of our pattern--the death of Mr. Abernethie, the murder of Cora Lansq,uenet, the poi-soned wedding cake, the ' motif' of the ' nun.

"I will add some other features of the case that engaged my attention:

"The visit of an art critic, a smell of oil paint, a picture postcard of Polflexan harbour, and finally a bouquet of wax flowers standing on that malachite table where a Chinese

vase stands now.

"It was reflecting on these things that led me to the truth

mand I am now about to tell you the truth.

"The first part of it I told you this morning. Richard

Aberuethie died suddenly--but there would have been no

reason at all to suspect foul play had it not been for the



words uttered by his sister Cora at his funeral. Th whole css

for the murder of Richard A bernethie rests upon thos words. As a result of them, you all believed that murder had taken

place, and you believed it, not really because of the words

themselves but because of the character of Cora Lansquenet

herself. For Cora Lansquenet had always been famous for

speaking the truth at awkward moments. So the case for

Richard's murder rested not only upon what Cora had said but upon Cora herself.

"And now I come to the question that I suddenly asked

myself:

"How well did you all know Cora Lansquenet ?"

He was silent for a moment, and Susan asked sharply,

"What do you mean ?"

Poirot went on:

"Not well at a//---that is the answer I The younger generation

had never seen her at all, or if so, only when they were

very young children. There were actually only three people

present that day who actually knew Cora. Lanscombe, the

butler, who is old and very blind; Mrs. Timothy Abernethie

who had only seen her a few times round about the date of

her own wedding, and Mrs. Leo Abernethie who had known

her quite well, but who had not seen her for over twenty

years.

"So I said to myself: ' Supposing it was not Cora Lansquenet

who came to the funeral that day ? '"

"Do you mean that Aunt Cora--wasn't Aunt Cora ?"

Susan demanded incredulously. "Do you mean tlaat it wasn't

Aunt Cora who was murdered, but someone else ?"

"No, no, it was Cora Lansquenet who was murdered. But it was not Cora Lansquenet who came the day before to

her brother's funeral. The woman who came that day came

for one purpose only--to exploit, one may say, the fact that

Richard died suddenly. And to create in the minds of his

relations the belief that he had been murdered. Which she

managed to do most successfully I"

"Nonsense I Why ? What was the point of it ?" Maude

spoke bluffly.

"Why ? To draw attention away from the other murder. From the murder of Cora Lansquenet herself. For if Cora

says that Richard has been murdered and the next day she

herself is killed, the two deaths are bound to be at least considered as possible cause and effect. But if Cora is murdered and her cottage is broken into, and if the apparent robbery does not convince the police, then they will lookmwhere ?

x85

Close at home, will they not ? Suspicion will tend to fall on the woman who shares the house with her."

Miss Gilchrist protested in a tone that was almost bright:

"Oh come---really--Mr. Pontarlier--you don't suggest I'd commit a murder for an amethyst brooch and a few worthless sketches ?"

"No," said Poirot. "For a little more than that. There was one of those sketches, Miss Gilchrist, that represented Polflexan harbour and which, as Mrs. Banks was clever enough to realise, had been c.o-I?ed from a picture postcard which showed the old pier still in position. But Mrs. Lansquenet painted always from life. I remembered then that Mr. Ent-whistle had mentioned there being a srll of oil paint in the cottage when he first got there. You can paint, can't you, Miss Gilchrist ? Your father was an artist and you know a good deal about pictures. Supposing that one of the pictures that Cora picked up cheaply at a sale was a valuable picture. Supposing that she herself did not recotgnise it for what it was, but that you did. You knew she was expecting, very shortly,

a visit from an old friend of hers who was a well-known art critic. Then her brother dies suddenly--and a plan leaps into your head. Easy to administer a sedative to her in her early cup of tea that will keep her unconscious for the whole of the day of the funeral whilst you yourself are playing her part at Enderby. You know Enderby well from listening to her talk about it. She has talked, as people do when they get on in life, a great deal about her childhood days. Easy for you to start off by a remark to old Lanscombe about meringues and huts which will make him quite sure of your identity in case he was inclined to doubt. Yes, you used your knowledge of Enderby well that day, with allusions to this and that, and recalling memories. None of them suspected you were not Cora. You were wearing her clothes, slightly padded, and since she wore a false front of hair, it was easy for you to assume that. Nobody had seen Cora for twenty years--and in twenty years people change so much that one often hears the remark: ' I would never have known her I ' But mannerisms are remembered, and Cora had certain very definite mannerisms, all of which you had practised carefully before the glass.

"And it was there, strangely enough, that you made your first mistake. You forgot that a mirror imag is rvrsd. When you saw in the glass the perfect reproduction of Cora's bird-like sidewise tilt of the head, you didn't realise that it was actually the wrong way round. You saw, let us say, Cora

inclining her head to the right--but you forgot that actually your own head was inclined to the lft to produce, that effect n th glass.

"That was what puzzled and worried Helen Abernethie at the moment when you made your famous insinuation. Something seemed to her' wrong.' I realised myself the other night when Rosamund Shane made an unexpected remark what happens on such an occasion. Everybody inevitably looks at the speaker. Therefore, when Mrs. Leo felt something was 'wrong,' it must be that something was wrong with Cora Lansqusntt. The other evening, after talk about mirror images and 'seeing oneself' I think Mrs. Leo experimented before a looking-glass. Her own face is not particularly asymmetrical. She probably thought of Cora, remembered how Cora used to incline her head to the right, did so, and looked in the glass when, of course, the image seemed to her 'wrong' and she realised, in a flash, just what had been wrong on the day of the funeral. She puzzled it out--either Cora had taken to inclining her head in the opposite direction --most unlikely--or else Cora had not ben Cora. Neither way seemed to her to make sense. But she determined to tell Mr..Entwhistle of her discovery at once. Someone who was

used to getting up early was already about, and followed her down, and fearful of what revelations she might be about to make struck her down with a heavy doorstop."

Poirot paused and added:

"I may as well tell you now, Miss Gilchrist, that Mrs. Abernetkie's concussion is not serious. She will soon be able to tell us her own story."

"I never did anything of the sort," said Miss Gilchrist. "The whole thing is a wicked lie."

"It was you that day," said Michael Shane suddenly. He had been studying Miss Gilchrist's face. "I ought to have seen it sooner--I felt in a vague kind of way I had seen you before somewhere---but of course one never looks much at "he stopped.

"No, one doesn't bother to look at a mere companion-help," said Miss Gilchxist. Her voice shook a little. "A drudge, a domestic drudge I Almost a servant I But go on, M. Poirot. Go on with this fantastic piece of nonsense 1"

"The suggestion of murder thrown out at the funeral was .only the first step, of course," said Poirot. "You had more n reserve. At any moment you were prepared to admit to having listened to a conversation between Richard and his sister. What he actually told her, no doubt, was the fact that

he had not long to live, and that explains a cryptic phrase in

the letter he wrote her after getting home. The ' nun ' was

another of your suggestions. The nun--or rather nuns--who

called at the cottage on the day of the inquest suggested to

you a mention of a nun who was ' following you round,' and

?

u used that when you were anxious to hear what Mrs.

mothy was saying to her sister-in-law at Enderby. And

also because you wished to accompany her there and find out

for yourself lust how suspicions were going. Actually to

poison yourself, badly but not fatally, with arsenic, is a very

old device--and I may say ,that it served to awaken Inspector

Morton's suspicions of you.

"But the picture ?" said Rosamund. "What kind of a

picture was it ?"

Poirot slowly unfolded a telegram.

"Ths' morningv I rangy up Mr. Entwhistle,. a responsible

person, to go to Stansfield Grange and, acting on aumonry

from Mr. Abernethie himself" (here Poirot gave a hard stare

at Timothy) "to look amongst the pictures in Miss Gilchrist's

room and select the one of Polflexan Harbour on pretext of

having it reframed as a surprise for Miss Gilchrist. He was

to take it back to London and call upon Mr. Guthrie whom I

had warned by telegram. The hastily painted sketch of

Polflexan Harbour was removed and the original picture

exposed."

He held up the telegram and read:

"Definitely a Vermeer. Guthrie."

Suddenly, with electrifying effect, Miss Gilchrist burst into

speech.

"I knew it was a Vermeer. I knew it I She didn't know I

Talking about Rembrandts and Italian Primitives and unable

to recognise a Vermeer when it was under her nose I Always

prating about Art--and really knowing nothing about it!

She was a thoroughly stupid woman. Always maundering on

about this place--about Enderby, and what they did there as

children, and about Richard and Timothy and Laura and all

the rest of them. Rolling in money always! Always the

best of everything those children had. You don't know how

boring it is listening to somebody going on about the same

things, hour after hour and day after day. And saying, ' Oh

yes, Mrs. Lansquenet' and 'Really, Mrs. Lansquenet ?'

Pretending to be interested. And really bored--bored-- bored... And nothing to look forward to... And then--a

Vermeer I I saw in the papers that a Vermeer sold the other

day for over five thousand pounds I"



"You killed her--in that brutal way--for five thousand

pounds ?" Susan's voice was incredulous.

"Five thousand pounds," said Poirot, "would have rented and equipped a teashop..."

Miss Gflchrist turned to him.

"At least," she said. "You do understand. It was the only chance I'd ever get. I had to have a capital sum." Her voice vibrated with the force and obsession of her dream. "I was going to call it the Palm Tree. And have little camels as menu holders. One can occasionally get quite nice china--export rejects--not that awful white utility stuff. I meant to start it in some nice neighbourhood where nice people would come in. I had thought of Rye... Or perhaps Chichester... I'm sure I could have made a success of it." She paused a

minute, then added musingly, "Oak tables--and little basket

chairs with striped red and vhite cushions "

For

a few moments, the tea-shop that would never be, seemed more

real than the Victorian solidity of the drawing-room at Enderby...

It

was Inspector Morton who broke the spell.

Miss

Gilchrist tu,,rned to him quite politely.

"Oh,

certainly, she said. "At once. I don't want to give

any trouble, I'm sure. After all, if I can't have the Palm

Tree, notking really seems to matter very much ....

She

went out of the room with him and Susan said, her voice

still shaken:

"I've never imagined a lady-lille murderer. It's horrible ....

CHAPTER

XXV

"BuT

I DON'T understand about the wax flowers," said Rosamund.

She

fixed Poirot with large reproachful blue eyes.

They

were at Helen's flat in London. Helen herself was resting on the sofa and Rosamund and Poirot were having tea with her.

"I don't see that wax flowers had anything to do with it," said Rosamund. "Or the malachite table."

"The

malachite table, no. But the wax flowers were Miss Gilchrist's second mistake. She said how nice they looked on the malachite table. And you see, Madame, she could not have seen them there. Because they had been broken and put away before she arrived with t-he Timothy



Abernethies. So sh, could only haw s,en thetn wh, n shs was there as Cora Lansqutnet."

"That was stupid of her, wasn't it ?" said Rosamund.

Po[rot shook a forefinger at her.

"It shows you, Madame, the dangers of conversation. It is a profound belief of mine that if you can induce a person to talk to you for long enough, on any subject whatever, sooner or later they will give themselves away. Miss Gilchrist did."

"I shall have to be careful," said Rosamund thoughtfully.

Then she brightened up.

"Did you know ? I'm going to have a baby."

"Aha! So that is the meaning of Harley Street and

Regent's Park ?"

"Yes. I was so upset, you know, and so surprised--that I

just had to go somewhere and think."

"You said, I remember, that that does not very often

happen."

"Well, it's much easier not to. But this time I had to

decide about the future. And I've decided to leave the stage

and just be a mother."

"A rlthat will suit you admirably. Already I foresee

delightful pictures in the Sketch and the Tatlsr."

Rosamund smiled happily.

"Yes, it's wonderful. Do you know, Michael is dlighted.

I didn't really think he would be."

She paused and added:

"Susan's got the malachite table. I thought, as I was having a baby "

She left the sentence unfinished.

"Susan's cosmetic business promises well," said Helen. "I think she is all set for a big success."

"Yes, she ,;a born to succeed," said Poirot. She is like her uncle."

"You mean Richard, I suppose," said Rosamund. "Not Timothy ?"

"Assuredly not like Timothy," said Poirot.

They laughed.

"Greg's away somewhere," said Rosamund. "Having a rest cure Susan says ?"

She looked inquiringly at Poirot who said nothing.

"I can't think why he kept on saying he'd killed Uncle

Richard," said Rosamund. "Do you think it was a form of

Exhibitionism ?"

Poirot reverted to the previous topic.

x9o

"I received a very amiable letter from Mr. Timothy Abernethie,"

he said. "He expressed himself as highly satisfied

with the services I had rendered the family.

"I do think Uncle Timothy is quite awful, said Rosamund.

"I rn going to stay with them next week," said Helen.

"They seem to be getting the gardens into order, but domestic

help is still diffcult."

"They miss the awful Gilchrist, I suppose," said Rosamund.

"But I dare say in the end, she'd have killed Uncle Timothy

too. What fun if she had I"

"Murder has always seemed fun to you, Madame."

"Oh I not really," said Rosamund, vaguely. "But I did think it was George." She brightened up. "Perhaps he will

do one some day."

"And that will be fun," said Poirot srcastically.

"Yes, won't it ?" Rosamund agreed.

She ate another clair from the plate in front of her.

Poirot turned to Helen.

"And you, Madame, are off to Cyprus ? °°

'

"Yes, in a fortnight's time."

"Then let me wish you a happy journey."

He bowed over her hand. She came with him to the door, leaving Rosamund dreamily stuffing herself with cream pastries.

Helen sid abruptly:

"I should like you to know, M. Poirot, that the legacy Richard left me meant more to me than theirs did to any of the others."

"As much as that, Madame ?"

"Yes. You see--there is a child in Cyprus... My husband and I were very devoted it was a great sorrow to us to have no children. After he died my loneliness was unbelievable. When I was nursing in London at the end of the war, I met someone... He was younger than I was and married, though not very happily. We came together for a little while. That was all. He went back to Canada--to his wife and his children. He never knew about--our child. He would

not have wanted it. I did. It seemed like a miracle to me--a middle-aged woman with everything behind her. With Richard's money I can educate my so-called nephew, „ad give him a start in life." She paused, then added, I never told Richard. He was fond of me and I of him--but he would not have understood. You know so much about us all that I thought I would like you to know this about

Once again Poirot bowed over her hand.

He got home to find the armchair on the left of the fireplace occupied.

"Hallo, Poirot,' said Mr. Entwhistle. "I've just come back from the Assizes. They brought in a verdict of Guilty, of course. But I shouldn't be surprised if she ends up n Broadmoor. She's gone definitely over the edge since she's been in prison. Quite happy, you know, and most gracious. She spends most of her time making the most elaborate plans to run a chain of tea-shops. Her newest establishment is to be the Lilac Bush. She's opening it in Cromer."

"One wonders if she was always a little mad ? But me, I think not."

"Good Lord, no 1 Sane as you and I when she planned that murder. Carried it out in cold blood. She's got a good head

on her, you know, underneath the fluffy manner."

Poirot gave a little shiver.

"I am thinking," he said, "of some words that Susan Banks said--that she had never imagined a lady-likmur-derer."

"Why not ?" said Mr. Entwhistle. "It takes all sorts."

They were silent--and Poirot thought of murderers he known...

TH END

# About this Title

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